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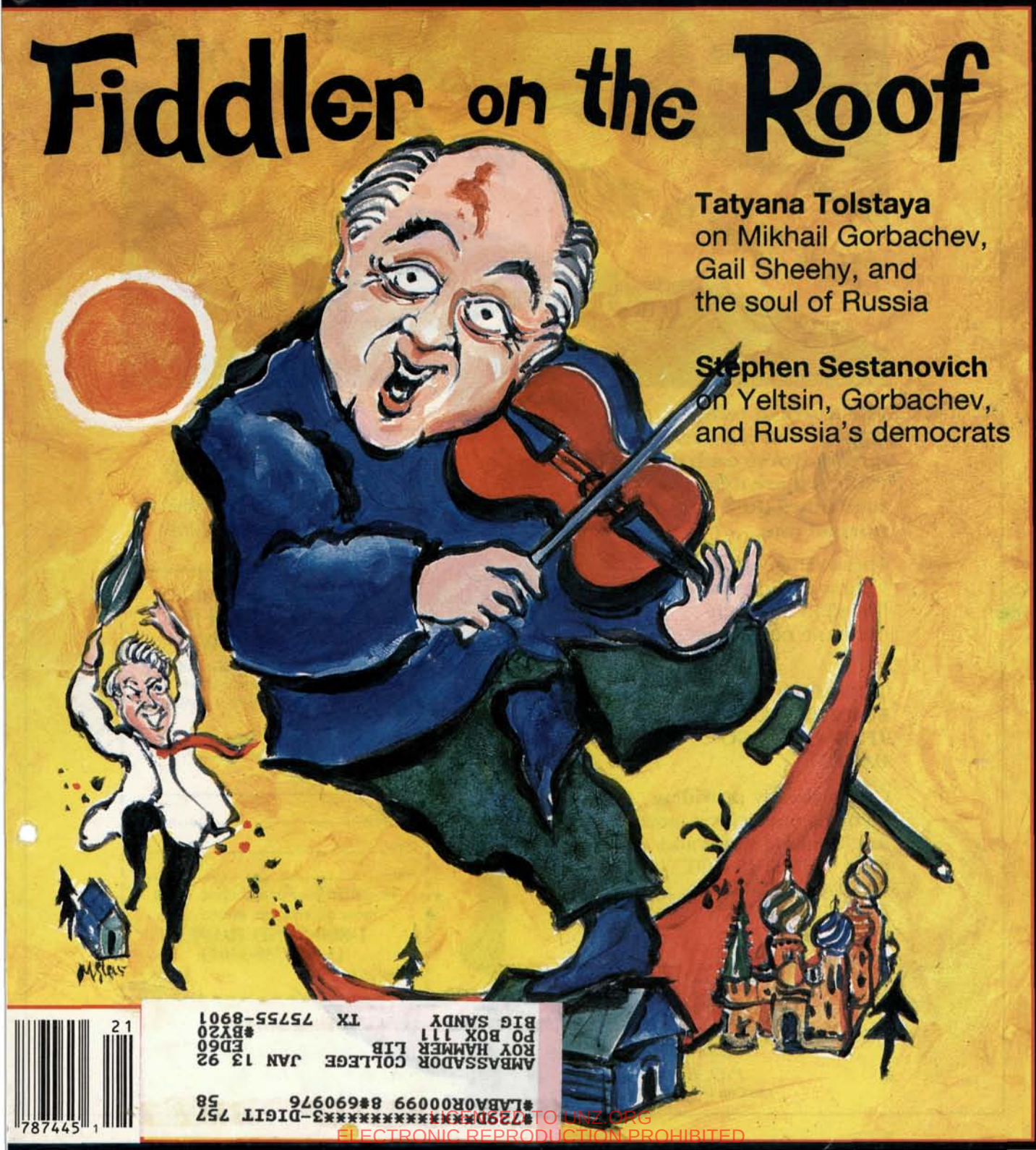
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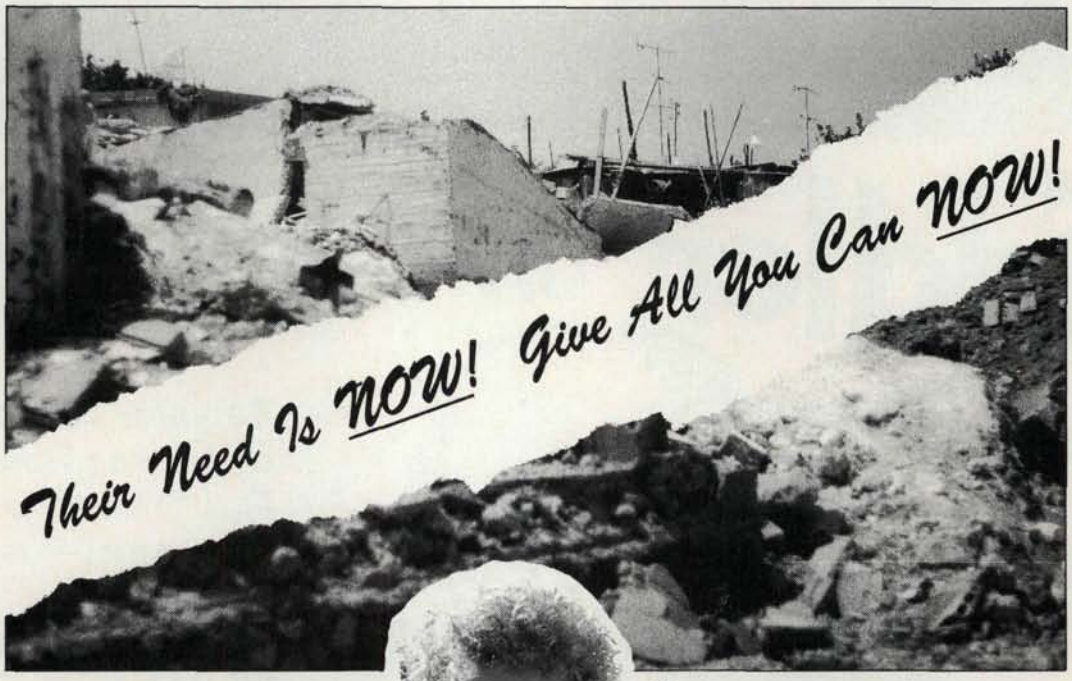

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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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FROM WASHINGTON

Song of Tsongas

"[Our country] is greatness.... We must all be soldiers—every one of us.... [Our country] needs our total devotion.... We need to create in ourselves the kind of steely will ... that our Japanese and German counterparts still have.... A nation's fate is inescapably a function of the strength of its culture.... Will, discipline, dedication, commitment, patriotism ... these are the manifestations of a culture.... To compete with societies with strong cultures requires an equally strong culture.... We are now being challenged by outside forces that seek to erode our standard of living [and] internal forces that are undermining the fabric of our social order. What would our ancestors have done?"

Well, my ancestors probably would have run away at such talk. Who is it? Benito Mussolini? No, Paul Tsongas. I was as surprised as you are to find the mild-mannered, sad-faced former senator from Massachusetts—now the only declared Democratic candidate for president—sounding like a strutting fascist. When I started to read Tsongas's eighty-five-page "Call to Economic Arms," I was expecting a lot of dismal techno-liberal babble about superconductors and such. And there is some of that. But as he strives to reach beyond sub-Sorensenian ask-nottery toward Churchillian wartime eloquence, he often overshoots the mark and ends up in Italy, circa 1925. Many of Tsongas's policy proposals as well have a fascist, or at least a corporate-statist, flavor, involving a symbiotic alliance between business and government to promote a national agenda.

Good for Paul Tsongas. First, for having the guts to run while better-known Democrats duck the fight. Second, for genuinely running on a set of specific ideas (as opposed to Gary Hart, who ran on the idea of ideas). It's like a dream of good citizenship to be handed a thick platform and be told to make up your mind about a candidate on that basis. Third, for evidently coming up with his ideas himself. Can you imagine George Bush knowing enough about what he thinks to sit down and produce a detailed and philosophically coherent eighty-five-page policy agenda?

Tsongas's paper deserves to be taken seriously, not just out of courtesy to a serious candidate but because he sketches a course that other Democratic candidates will find tempting. An emphasis on activist government combined with an emphasis on economic growth. Techno-glitzy and futurish. Seemingly bold without actually being too dangerous.

Tsongas styles himself a "pro-business liberal." This is in ostensible contrast to traditional Democrats who are "instinctively hostile to business interests," concentrating on the distribution of wealth without a thought for wealth creation; and in contrast to Republicans, who suffer from an "almost religious belief [in] an unfettered free market," which is outmoded because Adam Smith never saw a microchip. In reality, these are both straw men. The Democrats are far from hostile to business—look where their money comes from, who their leaders play golf with. And most Republicans are far from principled believers in the free market. As a result, the law books and tax code are littered with favors to various business interests. If the occasional Democrat worries about the distributional effects, or if the occasional Republican gets his free market back up, that's admirable. But there's little need to worry that this happens too often.

Having spent a few years practicing corporate law—hardly the exotic experience for a Democrat that Tsongas seems to believe—the former senator feels sympathy for businesspeople. But there's a difference between being pro-business and being pro-capitalist. Most businesspeople are happy to accept government handouts, protections, and special tax breaks. Tsongas is eager to supply more of these. But he is unable to explain convincingly why the government knows better than the market which companies ought to thrive, which investments ought to be encouraged, how long an executive's "time horizons" ought to be.

Tsongas wants a legal "requirement that [boards of] directors annually review research and development budgets" and another "requirement" that boards consider "long-term competitive viability." Any company that needs to be ordered by the government to keep in mind its own long-term viability is not going to make it in any event.

Then there's "economic loyalty." If you sent $100 to the Soviet Union during the cold war, Tsongas observes, you would be vilified as a traitor, but if you send $40,000 to Japan or Germany "to aid them in their economic war effort against us" you are congratulated on your new Mercedes or Lexus. Tsongas insists he does not advocate "mindless" or "counterproductive Buy America" policies. But if he doesn't mean that, it's unclear what he does mean. If American cars are the best, there is no need to call on patriotism to encourage people to buy them. If they are not the best, it is pathetic and protectionist to insist that Americans should buy them anyway.

For all his alarm about the lack of saving and investment, Tsongas has little to say about the largest source of social dissaving, the federal budget deficit—which his myriad subsidy and tax break proposals would only enlarge. As a "pro-business" fellow, he of course does not suggest a tax increase. As for spending cuts, he can only bring himself to suggest "looking at" middle-class entitlement programs, the necessary focus of any serious budget reform.

This timidity is revealing. For all the rhetoric about "sacrifice" and "total devotion" and "steely will," his eighty-five pages ask almost not at all what you can do for your country (other than perhaps buy a car you don't want). If you're in business, it's still a matter of what your country can do for you. And if Paul Tsongas can't be honest about asking for sacrifice, what candidate can?

Worst of all, especially for an insurgent candidacy, Tsongas's brief is boring. When one side is calling for a capital gains tax cut to stimulate growth and the other side is denouncing this as more pointless bounty for the rich, it may be tempting to stake out a statesmanlike middle position and call for a capital gains tax cut "for investments in appropriate securities held for a long period of time." But that temptation should be resisted. And not just because such a tax cut is still a bad idea although it is. But because the Democrats will not revive themselves by proclaiming that they're just like the opposition only less so. Tsongas, despite his best rhetorical efforts, cannot disguise the fact that he is deeply moderate. Right on some things, wrong (in my view) on many, but ill-suited to horseback. Senator, you're no Benito Mussolini.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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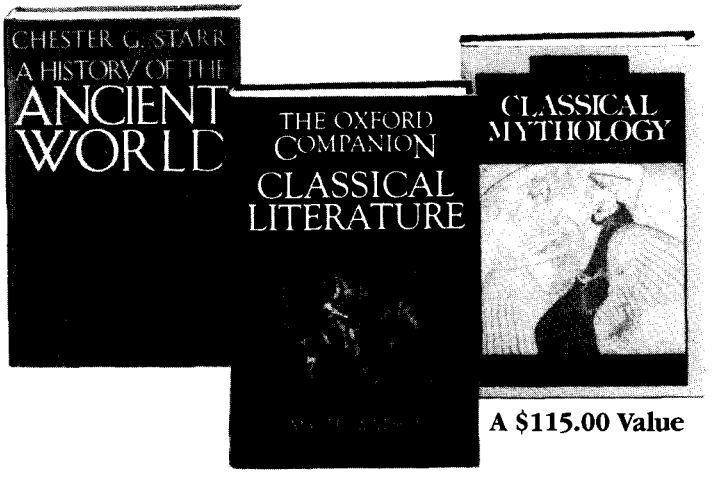

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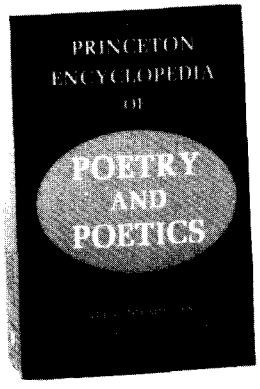

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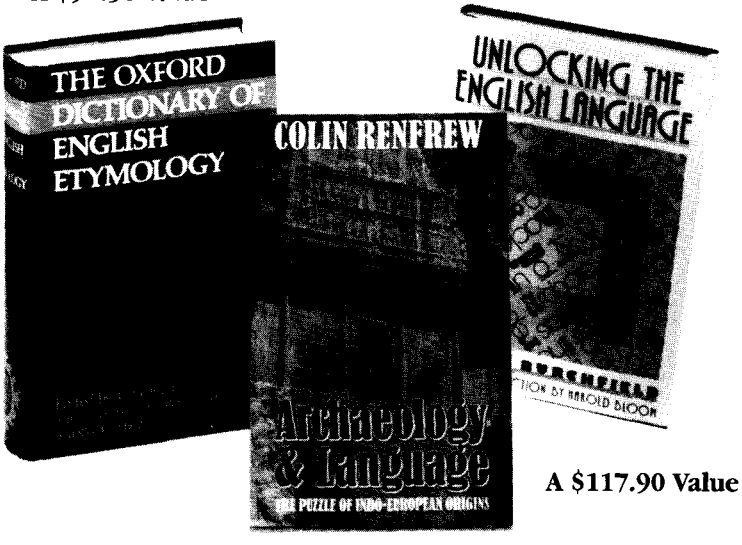

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CORRESPONDENCE

Dorian Orange

To the editors:
I was amused at Michael Kinsley's analysis of Ronald Reagan's hair ("Cover Up," TRB, April 29). We Californians remember that when Mr. Reagan was governor, his hair was orange, prompting a gag writer for Gerald Ford to have his client say, "Ronald Reagan's hair has turned prematurely orange." I suspect that somewhere in Beverly Hills hidden away behind locked doors is a portrait of Ronald Reagan that is slowly getting more wrinkled and grayer as the former president gets younger and younger looking.

MARTIN ELKORT
Los Angeles, California
(Via 900 number)

Battering Ramsey

To the editors:
When John Judis asked to talk with me about Ramsey Clark, I was hesitant, assuming (I think correctly) that he was out to do a job on Mr. Clark. On reading his piece ("The Strange Case of Ramsey Clark," April 22), I find no basic fault with the way in which my quotes were used. And each of us must take responsibility for the positions and associations in which we are involved. But what was wrong with Mr. Clark saying that he would not judge Saddam Hussein as evil because he refused to judge people as good or evil? What is wrong with Mr. Clark pointing to the tragedy—and crime—of U.S. actions in Panama and suggesting that if evil existed it might exist also in our own White House?

Whenever I've listened to Ramsey Clark speak I've wished I could vote for him for president—though, given his track record, I'm not sure I would trust his Cabinet appointments. I do know that in a world in which the United States can kill more than 100,000 Iraqis in a relentless and criminal air assault, I prefer to be counted on Mr. Clark's side of most issues rather than Mr. Judis's.

DAVID MCREYNOLDS
New York, New York
The writer is on the staff of the War Resisters League.

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To the editors:
John Judis and TNR are entitled to disagree with the politics of Ramsey Clark; they are free to denounce him as vigorously as they like. But the imputation of anti-Semitism is a particularly hurtful charge that may be leveled only on very convincing evidence. Mr. Judis's inferences do not remotely rise to that essential level, and Mr. Clark's life, work, and habits of mind refute the allegation.

In my associations with Mr. Clark, primarily in the death penalty and Middle East contexts, in numerous meetings and some travel with him over the years, and in my reading and hearing him in a variety of public and private forums, I have never seen the slightest hint of any bigotry of that sort. Since the appearance of the article, I have consulted with others, some of whom know him better and have worked with him more closely than I, and all agree: the accusation (or even suggestion) of anti-Semitism against Mr. Clark is false.

HENRY SCHWARZSCHILD
New York, New York

Brown v. Kinsley

To the editors:
In his April 22 TRB ("Mr. Fix-it") Michael Kinsley raises a number of points that are false and misleading. First, he inaccurately credits me with having represented clients I have never represented, specifically the Sultan of Oman and AUTOPAC, the trade group for imported car dealers. The correct information in that regard would have been readily available to him had he bothered to contact me.

Further, Mr. Kinsley insinuates that I became affiliated with a Louisiana company in order to assist that company in being awarded a contract by the City of New York, the site of the 1992 Democratic convention. For the record, I've served on the company's board of directors since 1982, long before I was "high in Democratic politics." I have never discussed my relationship with or intervened on behalf of the company with any city official. City officials have also stated on the record that they were totally unaware of my association with the company in question. It is absurd to suggest that New York was chosen to host an event as important as my party's nominating convention in order to

continued on page 41

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—ERIC UTNE, editor-in-chief, *Utne Reader*

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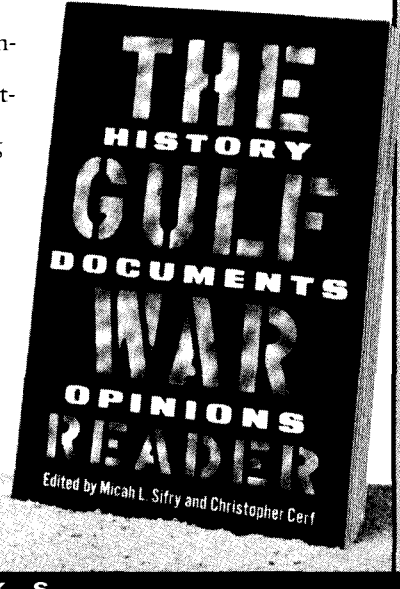

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MAY 27, 1991

RIO GRANDE ILLUSIONS

It's a good thing most Democratic members of Congress don't obey the policy dictates of the Democratic National Committee as automatically as the DNC obeys the policy dictates of the AFL-CIO. On March 23 the DNC adopted, by voice vote and with no debate, a resolution introduced by a representative of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, condemning the Bush administration's proposed free trade agreement with Mexico. The resolution was almost a word-for-word repetition of the material the union movement has distributed to Congress, urging not only that the "free-trade project" be defeated but also that the so-called "fast track authority" under which it is to be negotiated be "spurned." Later the DNC explained that "Democrats are not opposed in principle to a trade agreement with Mexico," but its resolution put it on record against any feasible agreement.

Congress is set to vote on "fast track" sometime in May, and the chances of passage now appear fairly good. "Fast track" would give the administration authority to negotiate a trade agreement on the understanding that the final document would be voted up or down by Congress and not be subject to amendment. Denial of "fast track" would be tantamount to defeating the agreement, since Mexico is unlikely to enter into negotiations when its result would almost certainly be saddled with qualifications to protect various local interests.

Organized labor, along with Ralph Nader and (until recently) much of the environmental movement, is opposed to the FTA on the grounds that, as the DNC resolution asserts, it would be "a disaster for workers in both countries" and would "destroy jobs in the United States, while perpetuating exploitation of workers and inflicting widespread damage on the environment in Mexico." The AFL-CIO has sent a six-minute video to each member of Congress showing Mexican workers employed by U.S. industries living in shacks without electricity or running water, working unprotected by U.S.-level health and safety standards, and surrounded by cesspools of toxic waste and sewage. A top union official charges on the tape that all of Mexico will look like the border area if the free trade agreement passes, and "hundreds of thousands" of American workers will lose their jobs as U.S. industries move to Mexico to take advantage of lower wages and a loose regulatory environment.

Their numbers are exaggerated, but the unions are right that some U.S. workers—notably in textiles, agriculture, auto parts, and consumer electronics—will lose jobs if the FTA is adopted. Pressure from labor and the Democrats has been useful in extracting a promise from the administration to set up a credible transition program to retrain such workers. But in the larger sense labor is wrong, because in the long run the FTA is likely to create more jobs in the United States than it will cost—both by lowering Mexican barriers to American exports and by increasing Mexican incomes so they can afford more U.S.-made products. Since Mexico began economic reform in 1986, opening its economy to foreign investment and goods, U.S. exports have gone from $12 billion to $28 billion and our trade deficit with Mexico from $4.9 billion to $1.8 billion. A more prosperous Mexico is good for North Americans.

A more prosperous Mexico is also better able to keep its environment clean. In 1988 the government of President Carlos Salinas passed an environmental law based on U.S. standards, and recently the government closed down the country's biggest oil refinery for pollution violations. What Mexico lacks is the money and manpower to enforce such laws. The country spends just 48 cents per citizen on environmental protection, as against $24.40 for the United States. Mexico has only twelve environmental inspectors along the U.S. border. Along with worker adjustment assistance, the Bush administration promised Congress that it would try to build enhanced environmental protection into the FTA. The administration assurances were sufficient to turn several environmental groups into cautious allies. If the administration doesn't deliver on such promises—and other pledges on stricter labor standards in Mexico—Congress should reject the final agreement. But with them, the FTA makes economic sense.

But the best reasons for Congress to approve "fast

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track" are political. President Salinas deserves the statement of support that a yes-vote would convey. As president since 1989 (and budget director before that), Mr. Salinas has cut subsidies, privatized state-owned industries, eliminated corrupt bureaucracies, and cut spending. As of 1987, this austerity had reduced the average living standards by 40 percent compared with 1982, leading some to fear that the pain might set off a violent revolution. That didn't happen, but the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (the name alone sums up many of Mexico's problems) felt obliged to steal the 1988 presidential election, against leftist opposition. Mr. Salinas is, then, no political virgin, but neither is he merely the piano player in the brothel of Mexican politics. He seems genuinely committed to forging a more democratic polity—perhaps to the point where his party might, at some future date, lose a national election—or, better yet, win one fairly.

There's some irony in the fact that one of the strongest North American advocates of democratization and economic justice in Latin America has been the AFL-CIO. It has been a dogged champion of free elections and of the right of workers to organize—against murderous resistance in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The AFL-CIO favors economic assistance to poor nations, including debt relief for Mexico, but draws the line at lower trade barriers. It opposed the 1982 Caribbean Basin Initiative, designed to open markets to goods from, among other places, El Salvador. It seems to believe that if poor countries get richer, Americans will get poorer. Happily, free markets don't work that way. Both sides can get richer.

Free markets also play a key role in democratic transitions. From 1982 to 1987 the Mexican economy was stagnant. Since 1989 annual growth has topped 3 percent. Inflation, 157 percent in 1987, is down to 14 percent. Per capita income is back above its 1982 level. The FTA, by creating a tariff-free market encompassing the United States and Canada, will stimulate investment from around the world and encourage Mexicans to demand political as well as economic reform. It's a recipe for real Mexican democracy. The United States should not flinch at it.

NOTEBOOK

PHONE TRADE: Would you vote for the fast-track path to a free trade agreement with Mexico? Let us know if you agree with us by dialing our Sound Off Line, 1-900-726-6671.... Some 86 percent of callers said we were right two weeks ago to call for congressional investigation of the story that officials of the Reagan-Bush campaign tried to make a deal with Iran to delay release of the American hostages in 1980.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS: For a newspaper or magazine, covering the publication of a book by one of its own reporters is a delicate matter. Should it review the book and append a waiver noting the relationship? Or should it simply announce the publication, as TNR does? *The Washington Post* faced this conflict-of-interest dilemma last week when reporter Bob Woodward's *The Commanders* hit the shops. The solution? Devoting four stories, 317½ column inches, and twenty-seven photos to promote the event, followed by a front-page review in the May 5 books section. "The Fourth Estate's premier investigative journalist," Clay Blair noted, has produced a work that "contains so many startling revelations it is difficult to know where to begin and how to convey them in a brief review." Mr. Woodward won "what appears to be unprecedented access to every conversation that took place by anybody of importance.... Everything you would ever want to know—and maybe were afraid to ask—about the run-ups to these operations is here in complete detail." On the negative side, the book fails to outline a cure for cancer. ●

The administration's fanciful peace plan.

HALF-BAKERED

By Martin Indyk

Secretary of State James Baker's fourth post-Gulf war shuttle through the Middle East is headed into thick fog. The Gulf war was supposed to have cut through the miasma. Two months ago, during victory's brief afterglow, President Bush confidently told Congress that "the time has come to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict." What happened to the new era of Middle East peace?

The first setback came from the Saudis. They had been key to an American strategy to reshape the political environment for Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Throughout the crisis and afterward, King Fahd and Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, as well as Prince Bandar, their representative in Washington, had privately spoken of their desire to solve the Palestinian problem, and of their willingness to make peace with Israel and to engage in a confidence-building process designed to get negotiations started. Yet in mid-April the Saudis suddenly announced that they would not be attending the regional Arab-Israeli conference that Baker was trying to convene. And their sweet nothings turned into just plain nothing when it came to possible participation in follow-on negotiations. There is no authoritative account of why the Saudis suddenly changed their minds. The religious establishment reportedly has used the occasion of Ramadan to press the royal family to

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return to their more conservative ways. The threats of democracy in Kuwait, of a possible Iranian toehold in southern Iraq, and of a revenge-bent Saddam rebuilding his power in Baghdad may have refocused the Saudis' attention on their immediate neighborhood.

The Egyptians and Syrians are believed to have discouraged Saudi attendance as well. Hosni Mubarak suspects that Israel is a potential rival for Saudi Arabia's attention and resources. Hafez Assad sees any Saudi confidence-building measure as a concession to Israel—"peace for peace," he says, rather than "land for peace." It would also complicate Assad's efforts to maintain a Syrian veto over Arab actions: at the putative conference Assad, with Lebanon and Jordan in his pocket, could outflank an Egypt whose role would be limited by the fact that it has already made peace with Israel. But with Saudi Arabia in, the game might be more evenly matched, and the Saudis might even be persuaded to use their financial leverage on him.

The negative interplay of Arab politics is also helping to resurrect the PLO. This is not the product of a Saudi change of heart. On the contrary, the Gulf states have continued to withhold the political and financial backing so critical to the PLO's international legitimacy. Rather, Jordan and Egypt are now competing to rehabilitate Yasir Arafat under their own auspices. Jordan feels it must have PLO approval to enter into negotiations with Israel with Palestinians in its delegation. Egypt, with the Arab League headquarters restored to its "rightful place" in Cairo, is keen to rebuild the facade of Arab unity. It also seeks to control the Palestinian card in any Arab-Israeli negotiation but has little influence with the West Bank Palestinians. A suitably contrite Arafat firmly placed under Egypt's wing would serve both purposes well.

Arafat's resurrection—crowned by expected visits to Cairo and Amman in coming weeks—would strike a second blow to the peace process. The momentary discrediting of the PLO and Baker's determination to keep the PLO on the sidelines have created an opportunity for Palestinians in the territories to take their political future into their own hands. They have responded with alacrity, the result of desperate conditions and an urgent desire to reap some political dividend from the "investment" of the intifada. The PLO has failed to advance their interests and they face a massive unemployment problem, with some 70,000 Palestinians in the territories no longer able to find work in the Gulf or Israel. In their three meetings with Baker they downplayed the symbolic demands that the PLO authorize the delegation in negotiations with Israel, and that it include East Jerusalemites. They focused instead on negotiating a transitional regime for the territories, even offering to trade the intifada for a freeze on Israeli settlements. But this newfound desire on their part to take the lead will not survive the PLO's resurrection. They will not then be able to demand less than PLO involvement in the peace process.

The exit of the Saudis and the possible entrance of the PLO is certainly not what Yitzhak Shamir had in mind when he committed Israel to a single regional conference under superpower auspices as a way to start direct negotiations. At that time flexibility made sense. The PLO was out, there was potential for a new era in relations with the Gulf states, the U.S. needed Shamir's cooperation, and Shamir needed a favorable Israeli image to raise Western aid for absorption of Soviet immigrants.

But Shamir's calculus is rapidly changing. Baker's efforts to produce Arab partners for this event have transformed it into a continuing conference with European and U.N. participation—an international conference by another name. And the mere prospect of negotiations has generated a Sharon-led effort by the Israeli right wing to undermine Shamir's credibility through a provocative settlements policy, and to bring down his government should he agree to Baker's proposals for the conference. In short, Shamir is heading into a thankless choice between a confrontation with the U.S. if he says no to the conference (since Baker fully intends to pin the blame on him) or a confrontation with critical members of his coalition government if he says yes. In these circumstances, Shamir is likely to prefer to do nothing.

Why, then, is Baker returning to the region, with his aides expressing confidence that the procedural gaps between the parties can be closed? What Baker sees before him is the mirage of a peace process generated not by a thirsting for peace but by a respect for America's new credibility in the region. None of the parties wants to say no to the secretary of state of the only superpower; all of them seek our good graces and our partnership.

With presidential engagement to remind all the parties of what they owe us, the U.S. might just be able to convert this unwillingness to say no into a willingness to say yes to an Arab-Israeli negotiation. But it seems unlikely, given the political risks for the Arab states and Israel in negotiations about real peace and territorial compromise. The true hope for a peace process lies elsewhere—in the pain that Israelis and Palestinians are feeling in the continuing intifada. They are the ones who are still at war, and they are the ones who need a brokered disengagement agreement. The combination of Palestinian desperation and Israeli discomfort has also produced for the first time an agreement on the objective: a transitional negotiation that would end the military occupation and provide self-government for the Palestinians in the territories.

It would be typical of the Middle East if Baker's efforts to convene a regional Arab-Israeli conference produced instead an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in the territories—the very process Baker tried and failed to generate last year. There is a precedent. Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977, in despair at the way Jimmy Carter's efforts to reconvene the Geneva conference had bogged down in procedural wrangling between Syria and Israel. The parties who wanted to do business together then found a way to do so. It could happen again.

MARTIN INDYK, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, recently accompanied Representative Les Aspin in meetings with the leaders of the Arab states, Palestinians, and Israel.

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WASHINGTON SCENE

WHAT A RIOT

By Andrew Sullivan

The first moment I noticed anything odd was when I got off my regular Number 42 bus, at around 8:30 p.m. It was Monday, and, after two weekends out of town, I had to get some groceries at the local supermarket. Crossing the street I noticed out of the corner of my eye a few policemen with helmets milling among a small crowd of people I assumed to be bystanders. The Safeway had just closed. The security guard was standing behind the locked glass door, eerily gesturing to me to leave. Then I heard a strange whirring noise and a sharp crack as a small rock whizzed past my head and landed in the window of the clothing store nearby. I looked around to find the crowd suddenly larger than I remembered—and bolting toward me down the hill.

My neighborhood is Adams Morgan, the ethnically integrated pride of D.C. Young single whites, Hispanic families, American blacks, Ethiopians, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and others live in what is widely touted as interracial harmony. The previous night, however, a riot had broken out in the adjacent, more heavily Hispanic neighborhood of Mount Pleasant. A couple of black, female cops had told a Hispanic man to stop drinking in public. According to the police, they had then shot and wounded him when he, his machismo offended, lunged at them with a knife. In the context of long-standing Hispanic-police tension—and perhaps just as intense black-Hispanic enmity—a riot ensued. The rock outside my local Safeway was the next chapter in the story of the havoc.

I live on the fifth floor of a building overlooking the main strip, a block away from the Safeway. As the riot set in, it was a vantage point for both real fear and curious voyeurism. In my few blocks, the actual grievances of Hispanics are not as real as nearby, the neighborhood more diverse, but the violence was just as tangible. Youths suddenly emerged to patrol the streets with scarves tied around their faces, lobbing bottles at storefronts; bursts of tear gas filled the street; helicopters with spotlights shone through the gas from overhead, like disco lights. And yet throughout the melee white student-types forayed into the scene with video cameras and flash bulbs. Reporters wandered the blocks; rioters milled with impunity among worried merchants who stood outside their stores in a vain attempt to protect them from looting.

So far as I could tell, none of the incidents I watched had any motivation other than the thrill of violence and pettiest of theft. Once it was clear the police were brandishing nothing more than restraint, a battalion of criminal entrepreneurs showed up to party. And despite the press accounts of this as entirely an outbreak of police-Hispanic enmity, all the violence I saw in my part of town was by young blacks. After three days of tension, this fact had yet to make it into *The Washington Post.*

In the first wave of smashing down my street, a bunch of about twenty kids—I'd guess between the ages of 13 and 16—took out the Korean businesses. They ransacked the garbage cans for projectiles and pounded the Korean grocery across the street for five minutes, until they finally smashed it open with a crate used for stacking beer cans. Then they piled in, smashing more windows, emerging with a few Coke bottles and some bags of Doritos. The Korean health food store was next. Occasionally a police car would drive down the street, watching the looting and cruising slowly on. The rioters ignored them, correctly guessing that they were no threat at all. A couple of Hispanic residents leaned out from their windows to protest the police inaction. "They steal like shit. Kill them!" yelled a man at a passing police car, referring to the rioters. "These are not Spanish people," a woman shouted into the air. "These are American people doing this." The police drove slowly on.

In a brief lull I ventured outside. I walked past stunned neighbors, interspersed with youths with bandanna masks on who gave the impression of owning the sidewalk. No one challenged them. Civility still blended with the knowledge that some of these people had just robbed and destroyed our local stores. A bare-chested white guy told us he'd lent his shirt to someone wounded in the stone-throwing. As I neared the local liquor store, owned by a particularly angry white man, a pillar of the local neighborhood, four plainclothes policemen piled out of a van, brandishing what looked like sawed-off shotguns. The liquor store owner had obviously warned the police he was prepared to shoot looters. It was the only threat of violence the police seemed willing to respond to in three hours of looting. Then came a shot of tear gas, and I walked briskly back to the apartment.

The next wave began a few minutes later, when most of the other storefronts on my block were smashed by a gang that ran in one sweep from the corner of the block toward my building. I looked down to see a tony Mexican restaurant, La Plaza, broken into, the kids grabbing bottles of wine and champagne, drinking them, brandishing them aloft triumphantly. The Korean-owned deli—a favorite among locals—was next. The looters smashed the window, ransacked for a while, and came out holding the neighborhood softball trophies the store's team had won a few summers back. Then the sports store and the drugstore, owned by an elderly white couple. Here the trophies were large cuddly toys—giant teddy bears and cellophane-wrapped pandas—and brightly colored inflatable balls, which bounced serenely through the streets, casting strange shadows beneath the street lights. A pile of toys was

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placed on a parked car's roof, and the kids flirted with some young Hispanic girls on the stoop of my building by tossing dolls to them from time to time.

After the first major tear-gas drop on the block, the sound of breaking glass subsided (there wasn't much left to break) and the street was emptier. It was about 11:30. I went downstairs again. Several Koreans were out sweeping up the streets. There were piles of beer-soaked glass in front of most stores. Waiters at a local restaurant, Cafe Atlantico, whose customers had watched the violence ver their entrees, stood around, dazed. An elderly white couple, one of whom worked at the drugstore, guarded the entrance, and a bandanna-wearing man walked casually toward them for another foray. "Stay away from here," the old man growled. "White motherfucker," came the effortless retort as the youth moved on. A young black man, who worked at the Korean deli, went next door to help another Korean store owner with his mess. "Hypocrite! Hypocrite!" the Korean shouted. The man recoiled limply.

My neighbor and I were joined in the elevator afterward by an old, white friend of the drugstore owner. He remarked: "There were only three police cars for the whole block, and one paddy wagon, and all of them were over there at that Korean place. And every fucking Korean in Washington was over there to help them out as well. It makes no sense to me at all." ●

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

QUAYLE ALERT

By Fred Barnes

The stock market will plunge 600 points the moment Vice President Dan Quayle becomes president, commentator Robert Beckel declared on CNN's "Crossfire." Political analyst Kevin Phillips said on the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" that the symbolism of letting Quayle be acting president for even an hour is "a major problem." ABC reporter Cokie Roberts spoke on "This Week with David Brinkley" of "that moment of terror" at the thought of President Quayle. Barbara Walters said on ABC's "Nightline" that Quayle's qualifications for being president "have always been in question."

You'd think Quayle would be numb to criticism by now, but no. The mauling prompted by President Bush's hospitalization for an irregular heartbeat

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shocked him. John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, was surprised too. He expected the president's illness to raise questions about Quayle, but not so suddenly. David Beckwith, Quayle's press secretary, didn't anticipate the fury. "I thought the media feeding frenzy had been weathered in 1989," he said. Guess not. Quayle-bashing reached seismic levels after Bush checked into Bethesda Naval Hospital on May 4.

Personal animosity toward Quayle is understandable. Hysterical fear of a Quayle presidency isn't. Quayle's success offends reporters, politicians, operatives, and policy junkies in the same way Ronald Reagan's did. They think he's a lightweight who glides through life on the strength of good looks and a strong staff. Of course there's an element of truth in this. Quayle is rich, privileged, conservative, and plays golf. Mitch Daniels, a Quayle pal, says many political reporters are roughly the same age as Quayle, 44, and suffer from "peer envy." He's simple, their lives are complicated. He was apathetic in college, they were politically engaged. He's a dim bulb, they're brainy. Yet he's veep now and they're scribblers. Life is unfair.

OK, but why the panic about a Quayle presidency? It's irrational. Despite what reporters think, Quayle isn't stupid. I'd say he's of average intelligence for those in his line of work. So were Reagan, Gerald Ford, and Harry Truman, none of whom brought the country to ruin. Quayle is a conservative, but not a whacko. He's a Reaganite, but he lacks Reagan's ideological zeal, and he's not close to matching Reagan as a political salesman. Is he more likely than Reagan or Bush to get the country in a war? Hardly. "He'd have a conventional conservative staff," says a Quayle adviser. "He'd go for conventional conservative policies." With Quayle in the Oval Office, liberals would have little reason to tremble, conservatives not much ground for thinking a new era was upon us. "Might be boring," says Daniels.

Bush's heart flutter triggered remarkably little jockeying at the White House. For Bushies "it flashed in front of their eyes they could be out in the private sector," says a White House official. Then Bush left the hospital after two days and anxiety faded. Still, a Quayle presidency would be different from Bush's. Quayle is more comfortable with neoconservatives (Richard Perle, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Ken Adelman, Defense Undersecretary Paul Wolfowitz) and supply-siders (Jack Kemp, Federal Reserve nominee Larry Lindsey) than Bush is. He likes Pentagon hard-liners. He hosted a dinner in honor of Cap Weinberger, Reagan's defense secretary, on April 24. Quayle's key aides, including chief of staff William Kristol and congressional lobbyist Bill Gribben, are allies of the conservative movement. But he's also chummy with pragmatists like Transportation Secretary Sam Skinner and budget director Richard Darman, who's been a guest at Quayle's house more than any other senior administration official.

Quayle is a very effective inside player in White House policy-making (which Bush wasn't as vice president). But his outside game is weak. He's the opposite of Kemp, who lacks clout at the White House but can stir the conservative faithful. During the Gulf crisis, Quayle's influence with Bush increased. Unswervingly pro-Israel, Quayle persuaded Bush that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was a guy Bush could deal with. Were Israel attacked, Shamir wouldn't necessarily draw Israel into the Gulf war. Quayle was right. He was also first to urge Bush to acquiesce to Congress on a war vote. He predicted Bush would win, thus building a consensus for war with Iraq. Postwar, Quayle alone told Bush that America has a moral obligation to the Kurds. The president came around belatedly. Bush has landed on Quayle only once. That was at the time of Bush's summit with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989. Quayle zinged Gorby in a speech. Bush told him to knock it off. He did.

The absence of an outside game diminishes Quayle as a threat to other Republican presidential hopefuls. They're content for him to be Bush's running mate in 1992, assuming he won't emerge automatically as heir apparent to the Republican presidential nomination in 1996. I'm referring here to Kemp, former drug czar Bill Bennett, Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, Governor Pete Wilson of California, former Governor Pete duPont of Delaware, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State James Baker. Quayle is friendly with all of them (he was Bush's official envoy at Wilson's swearing-in last January). But there's been minor friction with Baker. The State Department has discouraged some of Quayle's foreign travels. Quayle's aides see Baker's fine political hand in that.

In spite of Quayle's poor showing in public opinion polls, no one at the White House has concocted a recovery strategy for him. He's largely on his own. Quayle's tack has been to promote issues ahead of Bush or more ardently. For instance, he backed term limits for members of Congress, clearing the way for Bush's subsequent endorsement of a term limit amendment. He's been fervent in pushing the Strategic Defense Initiative. Emphasis on issues hasn't improved Quayle's polls yet. "Quayle realizes he needs more of an edge," says an adviser. And not only that. The chief flaw in his speeches and TV appearances isn't substance. It's his lack of a commanding presence. His speeches are well written, but the delivery is erratic. On TV he's often slow on his feet.

The media assault on Quayle finally galvanized the Bush administration in aid of him. Bush arranged to encounter reporters the moment he got back from the hospital on May 6, knowing he'd be asked about Quayle. It was the first question, and he was ready: "Hey, he has my full support, always has, and he's doing a first-class job." At a news conference on May 8, Bush said he's eager to change the public's view of Quayle. "I want to help," he said. Meanwhile Kristol, the veep's top aide, coached Skinner and GOP consultant Haley Barbour for television appearances. Not surprising, they delivered the same pro-Quayle spin. Both cited Quayle's work as head of the obscure Competitiveness Council. So did Bush. The next step is up to Quayle. He must project a sense of authority. Maybe that's impossible. But if Quayle can't manage it, the pummeling will never end. ●

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MIDDLEBURG POSTCARD

TALLY HO!

By James Conaway

It is called a hunt breakfast, but it doesn't start until 1 p.m., if then. Don't expect grits and eggs, but oysters and clams on the half shell, served in the foyer. This is followed by beef Wellington and Bloody Marys consumed in a large room notable for the porcelain, the depth of pile, and theme throw pillows—a fox's face in needlepoint, the words "Hold hard" embroidered upon them. Everything is bracketed by oils of horsemen at gallop, the painted scenes remarkably like the real one out in back of this fieldstone mansion: rolling meadows marshaled by fences and woody verges that accentuate the breadth of grassland, commodious mountains (the Blue Ridge), and, straggling across the foreground, spotted hounds of distinct lineage, white-tipped tails held high.

The hounds belong to the Orange County Hunt, and with them are a handful of riders in black coats and high riding boots, whips in gloved hands resting on the pommels. They look just like the people eating and drinking, except that the indoor versions have replaced their black coats with houndstooth check and removed their spurs. Some have gone home and put on entirely different outfits, but not the serious riders. "We had half an hour of tone after the first fox went to ground," says a woman with her hair twisted into a bun, a bit of dirt on her jodhpurs. "But it's entirely too nice for good scent."

"Tone" is provided by the hounds—never "dogs." And they don't bark or bay. They "give tongue." Before giving tongue they draw through coverts so as to open on a fox. The object of the hunt is not to catch the fox but to *almost* catch him for a while and then to run him into a hole, where he is left. Cold, wet days are best for the scent of the sleek, reluctant quarry.

Virginia's horsy senator, John Warner, rides slowly up the meadow on a black stallion; his pretty, lightly lacquered companion sits astride a bay. The governor-elect of Rhode Island is already in the house—he owns it. Among other celebrities, Jacqueline Onassis rides with these people. The former First Lady is no "hilltopper," her friends insist. Unlike the other parvenues now cramming the countryside, Mrs. Onassis doesn't sit back or "coffee-house" (socialize), but pushes the inside of the equestrian envelope.

Fox hunting has its dangers, of course, even for those as accomplished as Mrs. Onassis. One of Warner's previous wives, Elizabeth Taylor, injured her back hunting here and ended up in the hospital. "Oh, there are wrecks," says a pleasant English woman, on this subject. "You know, groundhog holes. Falling over backwards while going up creek banks. I got stuck in the fork of an oak after being thrown, my feet dangling. Would have gone straight through if I was less well-endowed. And I had an ear taken off by a tree, on a green horse, but I won't bore you."

Hunting is indirectly responsible for much of the view. It forestalled development in a region famous for it. These days the sport has created an extended private concourse through which a capital ganglion of Washington wealth and influence tally-hos most weekends, giving nearby Middleburg a reputation as "the ground-zero of American fox hunting." The town's streets are shingled with derivatives: the Hunt Scene, the Finicky Filly, Dominion Saddlery, the Fox Room, the Iron Jockey. Police cruisers have foxes painted on the doors; the exclusive local girls school, Foxcroft, divides classes into teams of Foxes and Hounds, and students may board their own horses, as well as their Jaguars.

To belong to the Orange County Hunt you must also own land within its boundaries. The hunt is arguably the most exclusive in America and has a curious history, being located not in Orange County, New York, where it originated, but here in Fauquier County, Virginia. In 1905 E. H. Harriman, master of the hunt, fed up with the hard winters in New York, moved it officially to Virginia. He bought land and traveled down in his private railway coach; other New Yorkers followed. More property was leased and farmers cajoled into letting the newcomers ride through.

The area contains other hunts as well. The rival Piedmont Hunt was and is centered in tiny, serendipitous Upperville, nearby, the home of Paul Mellon's Rokeby Farms with a runway that accommodates big jets. At times it's a crowded field. After the Piedmont Hunt lost some prime turf to Yankee interlopers, squabbles arose over boundaries and the pre-eminence of the two hunts' hound packs that have never been put to rest. "It's still very political," says an Uppervillian. "Piedmont goes around giving turkeys to everyone, to let them use their property."

Outsiders get no view of these squabbles, however, only the occasional spectacle of horses over panels on Saturdays, and the distant cry of the hunting horn. At most Orange County weekend hunts a foreign emissary is in evidence, the guest of a member responding to a specific request or smoothing the way for some foreign jaunt of his or her own. Warner, however, is not known for advancing any notion more ambitious than courtship while in the saddle. "He used to insist on a white horse," says a fellow rider. "He charged around, acting like an ass, but lately he's calmed down."

As Washington's wealth and influence grows, there are an increasing number of Washingtonians among the tally-hoers. They're known as "farmettes," in the dismissive local lingo. F. Turner Reuter Jr., owner of the Red Fox Inn, explains: "You can drive from Middleburg to within a few blocks of the White House without a single stoplight. Most of the people here make

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their living in D.C. A guy comes in who doesn't know the country and so he imitates what he sees. He tries to make everything perfect. He wipes out the habitat by getting rid of the honeysuckle and stripping the woods to make it look like a park." Farming by Ralph Lauren.

Another phrase for a *nouveau* land holding is "cocktail farm." Many cocktail farmers want to ride with the hunt, nevertheless. According to Alexander Mackay-Smith, a former fox hunter himself who must now walk with the aid of two silver-headed canes, this has led to some problems: "We have more riders in the hunt, and just as much ignorance. Too many people point their horses at the behinds of the horse in front." Some Washington habits, it seems, are just too hard to kick.

JAMES CONAWAY is the author of *Napa: The Story of an American Eden* (Houghton Mifflin).

How to bungle bank reform.

BAD CHECKS

By Robert Kuttner

The Bush administration's plan to fix the banking system at least reflects a clear theory of how the economy works—the theory of self-regulating markets. This fits some sectors of the economy well, including most consumer products. But if applied to banking it would expose the entire system to greater risk of collapse.

The administration's plan is a variation on the standard conservative economic story: over-regulation, and the strain of circumventing it, is what wrecked banks. The regulatory schema devised in the '30s, somewhat wrongheaded then, is moot now. Customers no longer need banks to place deposits—they can use money market funds. Nor do most borrowers need banks as a source of loans, which they can get from commercial credit companies or by selling their own notes in the "commercial paper" market. Main Street businesses may still need banks, but newly risk-averse banks may not need them. Meanwhile, hybrid financial conglomerations like Sears or Amex, as well as brokerage houses, have invaded the most profitable parts of banking territory, while banks are barred from the profitable territory of underwriting and selling stock.

In the administration view, if the financial services business is melding into one big industry, then it makes no sense to maintain regulatory distinctions between banks, insurance companies, and stock underwriters, or to bottle up banks in states or regions. This is all the more true, they claim, in a global environment where the foreign competitors of U.S. banks are behemoths that face few such constraints. The remedy, therefore, is more deregulation, plus a dose of better bank examination. The Treasury plan, now pending before Congress, would allow banks to underwrite stocks, sell insurance, and operate nationwide. It would even breach the more fundamental barrier between banking and commerce, by allowing industrial firms to own banks and vice versa. As a concession to worries about cascading bank failures, the plan would also stiffen government supervision of banks, create high "firewalls" between banks and their affiliated non-bank companies, and slightly limit deposit insurance. In principle, by promoting more entrepreneurial banks, the plan restores the banking system to health.

This vision, unfortunately, is too good to be true. No matter how boundaries are blurred, the economy cannot get along without banks because banks are part of the monetary system. Banks are not like ordinary businesses, because they use other people's money, and literally create new money whenever they extend credit. When this cycle goes into reverse, after an orgy of speculative lending, as in the 1920s or 1980s, the credit system implodes—and with it the economy. No matter how the government tinkers with the technicalities of deposit insurance, the "too big to fail" doctrine is here to stay, because the government cannot afford to let huge financial institutions collapse. Banks and S&Ls got into trouble in the '80s by straying into risky businesses. By allowing commercial banks into ever riskier activities, government only stretches its tattered safety net that much more thinly.

But tellingly, no coherent Democratic opposition to the administration plan has emerged. The closest thing to an opposition view is that of the House Banking Committee chairman, Henry Gonzalez, who wants to shore up the FDIC and to tighten federal banking supervision, locating it in a single independent agency. This new agency would conduct more frequent and detailed audits. Gonzalez is skeptical of the proposal to give banks expanded powers, but even he is not certain where to draw the line.

Nor is Gonzalez's position the majority view, even among Democrats. On May 7 a House Banking subcommittee approved Gonzalez's bill to couple refunding of the FDIC with earlier intervention and tighter supervision. Later this month the subcommittee, which is still splintered on the bigger policy issues, will take up the more sweeping changes in banking powers sought by the administration, as well as Gonzalez's own proposal to consolidate bank regulation. Senate Democrats are even more muddled. The Senate banking chairman, Donald Riegle, one of the Keating Five, is more attuned to politics as usual—balancing the interests of the affected industries, and is said to favor a variant of the administration plan.

Banks have been a puzzle for liberals since the early Republic. The populists of a century ago hated banks, but recognized their own desperate need for bank credit. The Federal Reserve system, created in 1913, is the bastard child of populists who wanted and got "fiat mon-

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ey" and money center banks that wanted and got control of the new Reserve system. Our major industrial competitors have a handful of enormous, "universal" banks, largely free to operate in any financial sphere they choose—but their immense economic power is restrained by a tradition of paternalistic stewardship.

After the 1929 stock market crash, the House of Morgan emerged as archetypal villain, with its concentrated power to take deposits, make loans, underwrite securities, and organize entire industries. Morgan had been packaging bad loans as securities and fobbing them off on innocent investors. In the Depression, Congress separated commercial banking from investment banking, prohibited interstate banking, and anchored small banks with deposit insurance. The system would have safety in numbers—13,000 banks. It was assumed, sentimentally, that little banks would be more responsive to little people.

For several reasons this system worked remarkably well for four decades. Banks were tightly supervised; a generation of bankers had been chastened, and disdained speculation; the underlying economy was on a postwar roll; and neither international nor domestic loopholes in the basic fabric of regulation had yet been invented. In the postwar era, banks—savings and loans, too—were almost public utilities.

By the late 1970s, once money market mutual funds and NOW accounts got around the interest ceiling, companies found cheaper ways of obtaining credit, and deregulated money began flowing across international frontiers, the New Deal system was doomed. But these changes were not inevitable. Each one was permitted by Congress and the regulators, who were already flirting with deregulation. But once the regulatory fabric began unraveling, each loosening logically led to the next one. Banks faced with profits eroded by unregulated competitors took on ever riskier businesses—Third World lending, speculative real estate finance—to compensate for the loss of easy, secure earnings.

The banking question today is at one of its periodic great divides. Congress must decide whether it thinks banks got into trouble because they were deregulated, or because they were too tightly regulated; if the solution is to allow banks to become more profitable (and more vulnerable) by diversifying, or to demand that they stick to their knitting.

Consider some first principles. Historically, liberals and populists were skeptical of big, concentrated banks on two grounds: because they failed to channel enough credit to little people, and because they occasionally played against type and got caught up in speculative bubbles that caused the entire system to crash. You couldn't entirely trust bankers either to allocate credit fairly or to keep the system on an even keel. Liberals responded to these twin problems in two ways. To get around the bankers' disdain for ordinary people, they

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set up quasi-public lending facilities—the farm credit system, the student loan program, Fannie Mae, and so on. To temper bankers' speculative impulses and their vulnerability to the periodic seizures of the larger system, liberals tightly regulated banks.

It is hard to remember those first principles, because lately it is precisely the regulated banks that have been failing—at taxpayer expense—and not the unregulated hybrids. Hence conservatives have been able to argue, with some cogency, that regulation has yielded the opposite of its intended result. Of course, bank regulation has been in the hands of people who don't entirely believe in it, leading to a decade of lax supervision, rampant speculation, and taxpayer bailout. And the quasi-public lending agencies like Fannie Mae, with encouragement from the same free market crowd, have mutated into profit-maximizing private institutions.

A liberal view of banking, it seems to me, should seek to reconcile the broad diffusion of credit with a system well bolstered against the risks of bailout and collapse. From this perspective, the most dangerous thing about the administration plan is the breaching of the barrier between commerce and finance. The administration has no good answer to the concern that if, say, a GM owned a large commercial bank, there would be opportunities for mischief that could breach any firewall, as well as an enlarged risk of federal bailout. GM's bank would be serving two masters. It could give GM access to cheaper credit; it could subtly pressure GM suppliers to favor it with business; and if GM were ever in danger, the government would have to worry about the solvency of the affiliated bank—or vice versa. Melding finance and commerce would effectively extend the federal safety net to the entire economy, with attendant risks. Likewise, allowing banks into the securities business runs the risk of repeating the abuses of Morgan and Co. in the '20s. If banks and brokerages had been merged in the '80s, hostile takeover artists would have palmed off a lot of junk on banks, and banks would have marketed Third World debt as securities.

Lately there has been a lot of nonsense about the "genie being out of the bottle." Allegedly globalization and the computer make bank regulation impossible. But in the Morgan era, long before computers, the money trust operated globally and invented all sorts of hybrid securities to fob off risks on the public. The genie was squeezed back into the bottle during the New Deal, with good effect.

Banks, in sum, are still special. They still, uniquely, create money. At the same time, however, the old populist mistrust of bigness has become irrational and even self-defeating. There is good reason to let banks operate nationwide, in order to diversify risk, as long as they are subject to tighter supervision and to the requirements of the Community Reinvestment Act, which requires them to meet local credit needs and not just siphon out deposits. But there is little reason to allow banks into other financial businesses, or vice versa.

Logically, the evolution of financial conglomeration pushes bank regulatory policy to either of two extremes. One is to move in the direction of European-style universal banking, reinventing J. P. Morgan-style financial conglomerates with the power to compete globally and to be profitable domestically. These, by some alchemy, would have to use their expanded power prudently, and would be a source of the long-term thinking that American management so desperately needs. However, it strains credibility to believe that the German or Japanese corporatist culture could—or should—be readily imported to the United States.

Alternatively, we could limit deposit insurance and membership in the Federal Reserve System to what some have called "narrow banks," which would be permitted to take in only relatively small deposits that would then have to be invested only in secure assets. These would be part of the government in everything but name. Other parts of the financial industry would then be liberated to be as speculative as they wanted to be—but without the unique capacity to create money and without any federal backup. Specialized institutions, like Fannie Mae, would be reclaimed as public lenders that would serve the credit needs of ordinary people, as their founders intended.

What is at stake here is not something called bank regulation, but a more fundamental question: how to restructure the financial economy so that it better serves the real economy. However, if recent history is any guide, Congress is likely to split the difference, giving banks more power while fudging just what is covered by the explicit or implicit federal safety net. And this would give us the worst of both worlds, so characteristic of this era of debased politics and government: more private speculation, more public liability. ●

Why they both got whupped.

AZTECS AND IRAQIS

By Paul Berman

Freakishly lopsided military victories, the kind that leave one army decimated and the other virtually unscathed, are usually attributed to the terrors of technology. In 1519-21, for instance, Hernando Cortez and several hundred Spanish conquistadors triumphed over Aztec warriors who may have numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and the explanation that comes to everyone's mind emphasizes the devastating power of Spanish blunderbusses, cannon, and Toledo steel. The victory of Robert Clive's army of 2,500 over 50,000 Bengalis at Plassey in 1757 is likewise attributed to cannon, and the British massacre of 20,000 Sudanese at Omdurman in 1898 to machine

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guns—and so forth through the long history of massacres, slaughters, and conquests, all the way to the victory of America's planes labeled F and bombs called smart over the armed forces of Saddam Hussein.

In most other fields of history, though—on broad questions of sociology and politics—explanations based on technological determinism are universally regarded as too simple. Why should the techno-explanation reign so serenely over that narrowest and most horrible of fields, the history of massacres? If you picture what the fighting must have been like between, say, the Spaniards and Aztecs, the advantages conferred by Spanish weapons and the terror they must have sown can hardly be doubted. Yet in absolute terms the blunderbusses et al. were not very fearsome, and even the terror must have subsided with time and familiarity. Every afternoon for several months in the Valley of Mexico it rains, and Spanish gunpowder is known to have turned into paste, and the irreplaceable armaments from faraway Castile must have been, on many a soggy day, anything but helpful. A vast, enraged horde of Aztec warriors armed with pointed sticks or even with rocks, or for that matter with nothing but bare hands, should have prevailed in the long run.

How to explain, then, a result so lopsided that, when the fighting was over, not only was the Aztec army finished, but also the Aztec empire and soon the religion, the language, and even the race? Tzvetan Todorov studied this question a few years ago in a book called *The Conquest of America*, and had the semiotically inspired idea of looking into what the Spaniards actually said about their experience, and what the Aztecs said. These commentaries touched on technology, but technology was not the heart of the difference between one side and the other. Mentality—metaphysics, practically—was the difference. The Spaniards, for all their preoccupation with medieval religious concepts, knew how to identify hard reality, and how to adapt to it.

The Aztecs were reluctant to draw a line between the supernatural universe and the natural one. The Spaniards arrived, and the Aztecs took to sacrificing youths. The Spaniards advanced; the Aztecs sacrificed again; more advance, more sacrifice; until at last the Aztec priests were slaughtering youths and maidens as fast as they could lay a hand on them. To no avail! The Aztecs brought out their secret weapon: a man dressed in a feather suit, which would have struck terror in any army that knew the supernatural meaning of the frightening feathers—as indeed every army did that Aztecs had always encountered. The Spaniards didn't flinch.

Even the numerical disparity between Spaniards and Aztecs began to diminish. The Aztec empire was unpleasant in the extreme and not just to its own virginal youth. This meant that non-Aztec peoples in the area, once they got over being spooked by horses, cannon, and long Spanish faces, came to regard the Spaniards as liberators. Whole tribes eagerly enlisted in the Spanish multinational coalition to rid the world of the necromaniacal tyranny of Emperor Montezuma. Eventually the Aztecs did see the need for additional defense measures and sent messengers to the neighboring Tarascan tribe, calling for allies and reinforcements. But the wise old Tarascan king had just died, so the Tarascans swiftly executed the Aztec messengers to send them off for a direct consultation with the departed monarch. Against such opponents, several hundred conquistadors were quite enough. For between Spaniards and Aztecs was a cultural chasm, and the chasm was such that after two years of campaigning, nothing prevented the several hundred from turning the population of the entire continent into slaves or corpses.

The efficacy of our own blunderbusses in guaranteeing the success of General Schwarzkopf's Hannibal-influenced blitzkrieg is the wonder of the world. But since the Iraqis could have withdrawn from Kuwait at any time, or could have staged a timely panic and flight, something more than technology has to account for a casualty ratio that reached, for every soldier killed on the allied side, four or five hundred dead Iraqis.

We didn't read much during the war of what the Iraqi leaders had to say about it, and most of what did get published here in the way of transcribed broadcasts and radio speeches received very little attention—except for the purpose of making a quick search for coded offers to pull out or surrender. Still, it was possible to notice some peculiarities. The Baghdad statements described a conflict between, on the allied side, an "evil, rancorous, malicious, and atheistic" Zionist-imperialist conspiracy, including an attack by the "Zionist entity" itself; and on the Iraqi side, a set of "principles," which Saddam spelled out. These were: "dignity and pride, faith and tenacity toward right, rejection of the wrong, and hostility to criminal usurper Zionism, support for the poor, and the fight against injustice and corruption," along with "invincibility, faith, capability, nobility, pride, dignity, courage, liberation from the foreigner, abstinence, and the liberation of the soul from the ill-gotten money."

Perhaps scholars of Arab and Islamic culture found nothing notable in the statements, but for many of us Saddam's image of the conflict seemed so supremely weird that we could hardly read his words, let alone take them seriously. Saddam's list of principles was likely to strike us as a politician's blather, and not worth pausing over. As for the Zionist-imperialist conspiracy, it was generally dismissed as Saddam's cheap effort to deflect attention from his own aggression.

But what if these speeches and broadcasts were serious expressions of actual beliefs? All over the Islamic world and in some other places too, masses of people accept the existence of vast Zionist plots. Fear of the conspiracy runs so deep in Iraq that in 1976 the Baath government enacted a statute decreeing: "Whoever promotes or incites Zionist principles, including Freemasonry, or belongs to any one of its institutions, or helps them materially or morally, or works in any way for achieving its purposes, shall be executed"—which

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was, in any case, an old custom by then, after Baghdad's anti-Semitic pogrom of 1941 and the hanging of Baghdad Jews in front of half a million witnesses in Liberation Square in 1969.

According to Samir Al-Khalil's *Republic of Fear*, Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi foreign minister during the war, believes that Nixon's troubles in Watergate were brought on by a Zionist plot, due to his sympathy for the Arab cause. It was just such a conspiracy, according to Saddam's speeches, that brought on the war. The annexation of Kuwait was a *defensive* measure to resist the conspiracy. Presumably Saddam and his top advisers knew that Israeli forces did not participate in the attack on the Iraqi army that began on January 16, but given their larger view of Zionist aggression, assertions to the contrary must have struck them as the sort of exaggeration that conveys a truth.

Aziz told James Baker at their climactic failed negotiation in Geneva on January 9: "Your Arab allies will desert you. They will not kill other Arabs. Your alliance will crumble and you will be left lost in the desert." After a dozen United Nations resolutions demonstrating the worldwide consensus, Aziz's confidence must have struck Baker as almost mad. What other proof of the coalition's strength and intentions was needed than the spectacle of half a million allied soldiers lining up on the Kuwaiti border? Yet people who believe in demonic conspiracies find it surprisingly easy to raise an eyebrow at visible displays of incontrovertible fact.

Imaginary Jewish conspiracy theories tend to be, after all, terribly alarming; but then again, they are somewhat reassuring. The imaginary danger comes from a small group of people who are regarded as horribly powerful; but because the group in question is limited and identifiable, resisting them is entirely conceivable, if only the great majority will stand up and be counted. Iraq was standing up, was it not, on the day that Aziz listened to Baker utter his threats? Why would Arab armies see the Iraqi example, yet remain loyal to a coalition that anyone could tell was, at bottom, a rancorous and malicious Zionist-imperialist plot?

Even after the war the Baath leaders could not imagine, except by positing some sort of mistake, how the coalition remained intact. The Iraqi statement that accepted Security Council Resolution 687, ending the war, noted that "regrettably, some states which originally had no desire to assist Israel and the United States to achieve their objectives have, perhaps unintentionally, contributed to this very end. . . ."

The stress on principles in Saddam's radio oratory suggests another oddity. It may be that not everyone draws the same line between fine principles and hard reality. For instance, what is a victory? Is it a tawdry practical event in the material world? Or is it a shining affair of principles and the ineffable spirit?

Signs of the shining ineffable did seem to be present in the wartime claims from Baghdad that victory was at hand. "The harvest in the mother of battles has succeeded," Saddam declared on February 26, in the midst of his country's precipitate retreat from the ranks of the industrial nations to the ranks of the preindustrial. "The soldiers of faith have triumphed over the soldiers of wrong, O stalwart men. Your God is the one who has granted your victory." On what ground did this victory stand? On the ground of principle. "You triumphed," he told the soldiers, "when you rejected, in the name of faith, the will of evil which the evildoers wanted to impose on you to kill the fire of faith in your hearts." It was in the heart, not on the earth, that the struggle was taking place.

The reluctance to retreat, the too-long delay before a life-saving panic set in, in short, the strange and horrifying immobility that littered the desert with Iraqi corpses, was the very thing that constituted the Iraqi triumph—if not in the present, then as a "prelude," in Saddam's word, to the future. We laughed when these victory claims were broadcast to the world. Yet on Saddam's own terrain, in the streets of Amman and elsewhere, no small number of people were cheering, not because they were misinformed, but because they accepted the spiritual interpretation of war.

The paranoid view of politics and the spiritual view of victory and defeat cast a certain historical light over the Gulf war. The difference between the combating sides was not merely a matter of interests, or of interpretations, but of fundamental understanding. It was a modern modest version of the huger gap that lay between the conquering Spaniards and the Aztecs in 1519-21. It was the difference between a culture that, at least in the field of military and political analysis, is ultimately oriented (however shakily) toward natural reality, and a culture whose larger impulse (among the Baathists, not of course among the Iraqi democrats) is toward something else. That difference is why we were unable to negotiate peacefully with the Baathists, why our threats failed to be convincing, why we found Saddam's government so frightening, why we had reason to worry about what would happen if the wealth of Kuwait remained in its hands.

The chasm between cultures accounts for the unpleasant double surprise that greeted us after the hundred hours were over. There was the moral jolt of noticing that, in trying to prevent Iraqi Baathism from wreaking any more twentieth-century scale atrocities, we had ended up with the kind of slaughter that has from time to time always accompanied the intrusion of Western power into the rest of the world. And there was the political jolt of discovering that, even so, we *still* couldn't influence events in Baghdad. We know how to turn the Basra highway into an auto graveyard; but what do we know of the ineffable world in which Saddam can fire his pistol triumphantly in the air to celebrate his spiritual conquest over the demonic conspiracy?

PAUL BERMAN writes for *The Village Voice* and other publications.

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FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

By Stephen Sestanovich

When Mikhail Gorbachev sent his black berets on a bloody spree in Vilnius last winter, the Western verdict was nearly unanimous. Perestroika was over, and the Soviet Union was headed back to the gulag, perhaps for a very long stay. Now, just four months later, it looks as though the country's sentence has been suspended. The recent agreement between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin may or may not become a workable "center-left" coalition. Yet even temporary cooperation between them—after a string of opposition victories—confirms the collapse of Gorbachev's hard line.

How could neo-Stalinism have fizzled so fast? Gorbachev's turn to the right reflected a strategy that was visible on every front—in his repudiation of radical economic reform, the revival of censorship, a broader mandate for the KGB, a bigger military budget, the selection of a conservative party hack as vice president, and so on. Fearing that the political tide was turning against them for good, many leaders of the democratic opposition actually accepted Gorbachev's claim that the people wanted decisive leadership, and sensed that he would be able to provide it where they could not. Yeltsin exhorted democrats "not to underestimate themselves," but their discouragement was pervasive. Anatoly Sobchak, the mayor of Leningrad, publicly raised the idea of suspending partisan activity for a year or two. And Sergei Stankevich, Moscow's deputy mayor, started saying that the system needed to become "more authoritarian."

By the end of 1990 Gorbachev's political position seemed extremely strong. He had reforged an alliance with the three central institutions of the Soviet establishment—the army and police, the economic bureaucracy, and the Communist Party apparatus. All three had been the target of his earlier reforms; all had been directly threatened by his near alliance with Yeltsin last summer. Now, having rejected a final plunge into free markets and real democracy, Gorbachev showed a new appreciation of what the conservative organs of the Soviet state could offer him. As political partners, they commanded the resources of power and experience necessary to hold the country together.

Yet if Gorbachev thought he was choosing stability and safety over the hazards of radical change, he made a colossal mistake. Though conservative, his new partners were not, in fact, committed to stability. They were proponents of a strategy of political confrontation that was at least as dangerous to Gorbachev as anything the liberals were promoting. In pursuing it, they reduced him in a matter of months from a commanding position in Soviet politics to one of precarious weakness.

Each of the three pillars of Soviet conservatism made its own contribution to weakening Gorbachev, beginning with the army and the KGB, which were the moving force behind the Baltic crackdown. Military leaders and spokesmen had for months sought one pretext after another for intervention. (The inability of servicemen's wives to find work was a favorite theme.) But when given the chance to act, they made a bloody mess that evoked popular anger—and activism—across the country. They made it impossible to carry the operation to its likely next stage: closing the parliaments of the three republics.

Without violence, the Baltic offensive might have succeeded in paralyzing liberals, who, fearful of seeming unpatriotic, had hesitated to challenge Gorbachev on the issue of national unity. After Vilnius, their hesitation disappeared. The bloodshed transformed an ethnic issue into a test of democracy. Within days it brought people into the streets for the first big anti-Gorbachev demonstrations ever held in Moscow. The Baltic killings may eventually be seen not as the first effort to make neo-Stalinism work, but as the first evidence that it would not.

The economic bureaucracies also worsened Gorbachev's predicament. Under Valentin Pavlov, who took over as prime minister in January, the government introduced a series of measures meant to reduce the money supply, control the state deficit, and attack the black market. It was a reasonable enough program, but unbelievably bungled. The abrupt confiscation of 50 and 100 ruble notes had almost no monetary result and destroyed any residual public confidence in the currency. Worse, huge price increases and a new sales tax were introduced without the broader reforms that

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might justify them. To reach agreement with Yeltsin and the presidents of eight other republics at the end of April, Gorbachev had to agree to reconsider both measures.

As much as the military and the economic planners hurt him, Gorbachev was probably damaged most by Party conservatives, who in late February launched a campaign to impeach Yeltsin as leader of the Russian republic. Their attempt to "behead the Russian parliament" (Yeltsin's words) set off an escalating confrontation between the two principal forces of Russian politics: the reform coalition known as Democratic Russia and the newly organized Russian Communist Party. The struggle culminated in dramatic rallies outside the Kremlin on March 28, in which the opposition defied both an official ban and the 50,000 troops deployed to enforce it. At this point, under the political tension that they themselves had created, the Russian Communists began to crack. A breakaway faction, "Communists for Democracy," announced they would not vote against Yeltsin, and the conservatives sheepishly called off the impeachment drive. They have been on the defensive ever since.

To be fair to the Soviet old guard, Gorbachev played his own part in compiling the sorry record of neo-Stalinism. He not only authorized all major initiatives, but also added misjudgments of his own, particularly in dealing with Yeltsin. (One commentator in *Izvestia* recently compared Gorbachev's handling of his rival to "stepping on the same rake seven times.") Even some of Gorbachev's victories, like the countrywide referendum in March on the future of the Union, have gone awry. Two months after the balloting, the resounding 76 percent vote in favor of unity has been totally forgotten. The referendum would, in fact, have had no lasting impact at all if Yeltsin had not put his own question on the ballot that day, asking whether the president of the Russian republic should be popularly elected. With that victory, he began to turn back the conservatives' campaign to oust him from office. The very different use that the two men made of the referendum is revealing: Yeltsin sought something real; Gorbachev, something utterly fleeting.

Some conservatives, surveying their failure, accuse Gorbachev of undercutting their strategy. But his true mistake was to let them go too far. He let them pursue a risky confrontation with the democrats at a time when his own political instincts could have suggested a more viable alternative. From the beginning of perestroika, after all, Gorbachev has stayed on top by dodging tests of strength. He bobs and weaves, trying at all costs to protect his power rather than wager it unnecessarily. Suppressing the totalitarian urge to crush opponents outright, he succeeded instead by wearing them down slowly, ignoring challenges that did not immediately threaten him. Such an approach would not have precluded a generally tougher line, but it surely would have argued for letting Baltic independence remain the back-burner issue it had become by the end of 1990. And as for trying to unseat Yeltsin quickly, what made Gorbachev forget that he had spent five full years chipping away at the power of Yegor Ligachev, his erstwhile Politburo rival, before finally ousting him?

The neo-Stalinists, of course, considered the status quo unacceptable and believed that reforms already permitted could not be reversed one step at a time. They sought the decisive turning point that only a pitched struggle could provide. Now that the results are in, it should be obvious that the Gorbachev-style drift they railed against would have served them better than their own go-for-broke strategy. By sharpening political divisions, the conservatives created an environment in which the opposition could recover its strength—by becoming more rather than less radical. The liberals rebounded not by trying to hold the political center, as some Western analysts insisted they must, but by meeting the conservative challenge head on, organizing demonstrations and strikes to back up steadily escalating demands. Their success confirmed this truth about revolutionary politics: when opinions are polarized, being in the center is not that important.

The collapse of the neo-Stalinist strategy means that the Soviet Union has at last been "East Europeanized." When the Communist regimes of the old Soviet bloc fell in 1989, it was widely said that their failure had no real bearing on whether Communist rule would survive in the Soviet Union. The differences were real enough: the Soviet system was not imposed from outside, it has been in place longer, and it has sunk deeper institutional roots. But this was only to say that Soviet Communists had a chance. It didn't prove they couldn't blow it. This year they did. From the beginning of winter to the beginning of spring, they traveled almost the entire route that Poland traced between 1981, when General Jaruzelski imposed martial law, and 1989, when he accepted "roundtable" talks with Solidarity.

An essential ingredient of the Eastern European revolutions is now clearly visible in the Soviet case: the demoralization of the old order. Recent statements of the Soviet leadership, from the president on down, are shot through with second thoughts about the feasibility of neo-Stalinism. Gorbachev has begun to counsel conservatives not to think they can exploit popular fears of disorder. In a session with military officers in April, he told his audience that, though the people do want firm leadership, what this means is not repression but simply the rule of law. The dictatorship of the past, he said, "must not be allowed to return *under the slogan of protecting socialism* or any other slogan."

Likewise, in presenting the government's newest economic plan in late April, deputy prime minister Vladimir Shcherbakov dismissed proposals to recentralize the economy. He shrugged off conservative demands that Gorbachev use the sweeping presidential powers he was granted last year. The political infrastructure that once made it possible to run the economy by decree is "simply not there anymore." The Soviet economy, Shcherbakov said, is like an army on the verge of

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disintegrating: unless it quickly effects an "organized withdrawal" from central planning and control, a complete rout will be unavoidable. In that case, "The troops [will] have to be stopped with a pistol from behind and the threat, 'One step back, for whatever reason, and you'll be shot!' "

The most defeatist note of all was struck by Gorbachev when he opened the Central Committee meeting of April 24. This was the same session at which he foiled an attempt to oust him by threatening to resign as Party leader. Having spent the last few months bitterly accusing the liberal opposition of wanting to take power, he now told angry conservatives that this was not a crime after all, but the most normal thing in the world. "Each party and movement is entitled to strive to attain its goals, including of course to struggle for political leadership and power." Democracy, he said, "is a thousand times more difficult than governing the country by tough methods. But there is no other way." These words echoed the reformist Gorbachev of old, but with far greater realism about the Party's cheerless prospects. To have any "chance of regeneration," he said, Communists had to be ready to "work sincerely, tactfully, committedly, and patiently" with the new leaders of the working class—a role, he noted, that was originally the Party's own.

Gorbachev's own discouragement is obviously not shared by all conservatives, many of whom boast that they have a lot of fight left in them. Yet the big talkers do not seem to notice how much their own horizons have narrowed. Consider their response to Gorbachev's recent package of emergency economic and political measures, worked out with the leaders of nine of the fifteen republics. A few months ago the very idea of leaving out six republics that are bent on independence would have horrified authoritarian nationalists. Today they offer no complaint.

The breakdown of neo-Stalinism leaves Gorbachev once more exploring an alliance with the democrats. He is now relying less on conservatives for the same reason that he walked away from the liberals last year. In each case his allies wanted to go further and faster than he did and began to threaten his control. Last summer Gorbachev found that many of his own advisers had all but defected to the liberals and wanted to commit him to radical economic reforms that would strip the central government of most of its power. The liberals further demanded he fire then Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov and replace him with someone more to their liking. As Gorbachev told the Supreme Soviet, soon they would probably demand his resignation too.

Last fall Gorbachev didn't think he had to accept a marginal role, and so he backed out. He can do so again. Won't he play at negotiations with Yeltsin while it's convenient, then cast him aside when it isn't? Doesn't Yeltsin risk discrediting himself in the process? This is clearly a risk for the liberals, but Gorbachev's failure to make neo-Stalinism work has sharply curtailed his options. Yeltsin, by contrast, enters the current discussions incomparably stronger than last time around. And although neither man can lightly walk away from the table, Yeltsin has a far more compelling strategy for strengthening himself while talks continue. The most obvious immediate payoff for him is that Gorbachev can no longer try to block his election as president of Russia on June 12. Still more far-reaching is Yeltsin's plan for what comes after election day. By the end of July he has said he wants the chairmen of local soviets across Russia (in effect, the mayors and county executives) to stand for direct election too. These are the conservative provincial power brokers who still run the system; many of them also double as Communist Party bosses, and Yeltsin blames them for blocking reforms, like private land ownership, that have been passed by the Russian parliament but can go nowhere without local cooperation. In making these people his next target, Yeltsin shows he is interested in more than the symbolism of his own direct election. He is proposing to break the system of executive power by which the Communist Party has remained able to dominate political decision-making. When this begins to happen, the revolution will be under way.

Yeltsin's handling of the miners' strike is further evidence that he will use his truce with Gorbachev to advantage. Some liberals worried that their boss might have been maneuvered into opposing the strikers by the crafty Gorbachev. (The myth of this man's political genius dies hard!) Instead, Yeltsin made his support for the strikers a bargaining chip to force Gorbachev to cede control of the mines to the Russian republic. The coal pits are not exactly the jewel in the crown of Soviet mineral wealth, but their transfer to local ownership will begin the breakup of the central government's monopoly control of exportable natural resources. Coal today; oil tomorrow. At some point people will have to stop saying that "opposition" forces are too weak to run the country; they *will* be running it.

The revival of the Soviet democrats is a huge achievement. They have recovered from weakness and confusion to renew a serious bid for power. Ironically, one of their greatest strengths is that they—like the conservatives—were wrong about what the people wanted. Even now, no conversation with liberal members of the Soviet intelligentsia seems complete until someone refers despairingly to the popular desire for a dictator, the deep cultural animus toward individual success, and so on. Evidence may mount that the Soviet Union has been "East Europeanized," but elite suspicion of the unwashed masses erodes slowly. Early this year the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research set out to learn who still supports communism. Their discovery: among college graduates, one in three; among those with no higher education at all, only one in five. An analysis of this disparity in the magazine *Novoye Vremya* asked innocently, "Can it be that the lower the level of education, the simpler it is for people to part with Communist beliefs?" Gorbachev and his neo-Stalinist partners already know the answer. ●

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Neil Kinnock's hard work pays off.

THE REWARDS OF LABOUR

By Hugo Young

Like the Democrats, the British Labour Party spent the 1980s out of executive power. But unlike the Democrats, Labour has a good shot at power in the next general election. This is all the more astonishing in view of the lengths to which it went to destroy itself, in kamikaze acts that have no parallel on what might still be termed the "left" of American politics. How did Labour do it? The answer has less to do with an easy ideological panacea than with a complicated story whose happy ending is still not assured.

To look back to 1979, when Thatcher's reign commenced, is to re-enter an almost forgotten age, when something unashamedly, if falsely, called socialism was the orthodoxy of British government. James Callaghan, the last Labour prime minister, would hardly have been reckoned a comrade by Trotsky, or even by Callaghan's illustrious predecessor, Clement Attlee, who ousted Churchill from power after the war. But Labour, intoning its commitment to the ancient creed, had won four of the five elections before 1979, and had been in charge for eleven of the previous fifteen years. It was a party of government, whose leader treated the neophyte Mrs. Thatcher with condescending distaste throughout the 1979 campaign.

Labour's response to defeat was to revert to an existence that sought almost to disavow its experience of power. The compromises of office—the abandonment, by Callaghan and his predecessor, Harold Wilson, of much that a serious socialist would call socialism—evoked swift retribution when office was lost. Constituency party activists, local city politicians, key trade union leaders, and hard leftist parliamentarians joined in an orgy of vengeful reproach for the past. Their serious interest in the future was more problematic.

For the first half of the 1980s, the Labour Party had a more radical identity than at any time in its history. Instincts that Wilson and Callaghan had suppressed now sprang into full, irresistible flower. Through a kind of putsch against parliamentary power, Labour became a party of unilateral disarmament, of disengagement from the European Community, and of something close to a command economy on the Eastern European model. Instead of the leader of the party being elected by the members of Parliament, he would now be the creature of the largely non-parliamentary party, dominated by trade union leaders wielding bloc votes bearing a crude resemblance to the size of their membership, and much influenced by equally unrepresentative grass-roots "activists." Instead of the MPs controlling policy, the party conference would control the MPs. If MPs did not toe the line, they would be removed not by the voters, or even by a primary election among the Labour voters in their area, but by a handful of activists. This was the vanguard party in embryo. Though headed not by Lenin but by Michael Foot, a decent leftist litterateur and the weakest leader the party ever had, Labour horrified the voters. Mrs. Thatcher won the 1983 election, with a little help from a war in the South Atlantic, by a majority of 140 seats.

En route to this debacle, however, something had happened that proved to be the beginning of a different story. At the time it seemed a catastrophe. Ten years ago this spring the Labour Party split and a core of its former leaders formed a new party, the Social Democrats. The departure of David Owen, a former foreign secretary, Roy Jenkins, a former chancellor of the Exchequer, and Shirley Williams, one of the more popular former ministers, signaled a serious contest for the soul of center-left politics that the Labour Party was by no means certain to win. There ensued a degree of personal bitterness on the left that survives today. But this was probably the decisive event that made possible today the prospect of Labour government.

Almost immediately the Social Democrats began to win parliamentary by-elections. In coalition with the existing minority party of the center, the Liberals, they even attained at one point an opinion poll rating of 40 percent—well ahead of either of the two main parties, and testimony to the effect upon a volatile electorate of a simultaneous assault by the Thatcherite hard right and the Labour hard left. The British are a moderate people. They were bewildered by the deluge of ideology and took refuge with the personable upholders of the middle way. The Social Democrats' rampaging successes struck terror into a Conservative Party

HUGO YOUNG, a columnist for *The Guardian* of London, is the author of *The Iron Lady* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), a biography of Margaret Thatcher.

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that until the 1982 Falklands War thought it might be doomed, and into a Labour Party that, in 1983 and even in 1987, posited as its main electoral objective the need to defeat the alliance of middle parties for second place against Mrs. Thatcher.

In the 1987 election Labour easily secured second place, and thereby put down a marker toward recovery. This process had begun very tentatively some years before, with the election of a new leader, Neil Kinnock, to succeed Foot in the fall of 1983. A young Welshman of oratorical power but no ministerial experience, Kinnock was the left-winger least unacceptable to the trade unions, the lowest common denominator that could satisfy an unelectable party. With no managerial experience in productive industry, Kinnock was the personification of a modern phenomenon: a man who lived for nothing but politics. In Labour's dire position, this could be put to advantage.

Youthful though he was, Kinnock knew all about the rusting levers of power in the antiquated Labour machine. He set as his first objective the oiling and modernizing of this machine, and the reinstallation of the leader as its unchallenged driver. For Kinnock—now the longest-serving opposition leader in parliamentary history—the priorities were power first, socialism second. After seven years the questions are: How far has this gone? What sort of government might Labour supply? And what is its chance of getting there?

It has gone quite far. The machine, if not streamlined, is certainly roadworthy. Kinnock understood that a main reason for the Social Democrats' success was the apprehension that Labour was controlled by unrepresentative, often Trotskyite cliques with a purely manipulative interest in the parliamentary process. A party-within-a-party, known demurely as the Militant Tendency, controlled a number of constituencies and succeeded, with leather-jacketed thuggery, in dominating public impressions of the annual Labour conference. Moving against it was a bruising undertaking, and even now it has not been eliminated. But the leader has transformed his position. He has freed MPs from defenestration by tiny cliques, provided for proper primaries, and ensured that he gets his way against the left in every organ of the party. One thing this man from the left long since ceased to be is a man *of* the left.

He remains, however, a man of the unions—one anachronism he has not dared to touch. Although the weakening of the unions is one of Thatcherism's proudest achievements (they have lost nearly 2 million members—20 percent—since 1979), the Labour Party is still in thrall to the bloc votes of Labour union leaders. The difference this time is that the leaders are Kinnock's friends—indeed, his key allies in reforming the party constitution. They also pay the party's bills. But the union link remains, according to the polls, the point that worries the voters most about a Labour government. The history of the Wilson and Callaghan governments, and their foundering on the rocks of union resistance, is doubtless being readied for service in many a Tory television commercial.

What Labour now stands for is elusive. What it does not stand for, however, is politically more important. At the last election, four years into Kinnock's leadership, he was still unable to describe a defense policy that anyone could believe in. He tried but failed to wriggle off the unilateralist hook, and that failure did his party great damage. Now, aided by events in the Soviet Union, defense has lost its power to wreck Labour. And Kinnock himself has changed his mind, and persuaded his party to change its mind as well. Labour is no longer seen as a unilateralist party. When this firm stance on foreign policy was put to the test, before and during the Gulf war, Kinnock positioned his party alongside Washington without significantly splitting it. Even three years ago this would have been a doomed undertaking. It is still unusual to hear a Labour politician lauding American values or attesting to pro-Americanism. But except on the incorrigibly far left, the party has shed the Pavlovian anti-Americanism of the 1980s.

Labour has also ceased to be the party of nationalization. It has plans for "social" ownership of utilities lately privatized, notably telephones, water, and electric power, but not for "public" ownership of industry on the old model. It wants to leave these enterprises in private hands, but to assert stronger state regulation over their running. And it has shed its profile as the party of punitive taxation. The Callaghan government ran a top income tax rate of 83 percent. Kinnock has promised a top rate of 59 percent, up from 40 percent now, but vows to keep taxes low for the majority.

Kinnock has all but ceased to use the term "socialism." Labour is now, supposedly, a party of Europe, a posture it adopted with reflexive speed during Mrs. Thatcher's later phase of hostility to everything from Brussels. It was a stick to beat her with, but one that a fair number of Labour people, almost as suspicious of Europe as they are of the United States, do not handle with much enthusiasm. Labour now also claims to be the party of the market, of decent entrepreneurship, of progressive management. It still has trouble producing businesspeople or traders who will publicly back it; and the intelligentsia, a vital part of the party's '60s credibility, has yet to be reassembled. But in the last few years Labour has come to resemble more closely the parties of the left for which upwardly mobile French and Germans have been voting for decades.

Some remnants of a distinctive leftism do remain. Labour is still wedded to an interventionist industrial policy on a simple, corporatist model. It is also more committed to higher spending on public services, perhaps the heart of its political identity. True, John Major is now vying for the role of public

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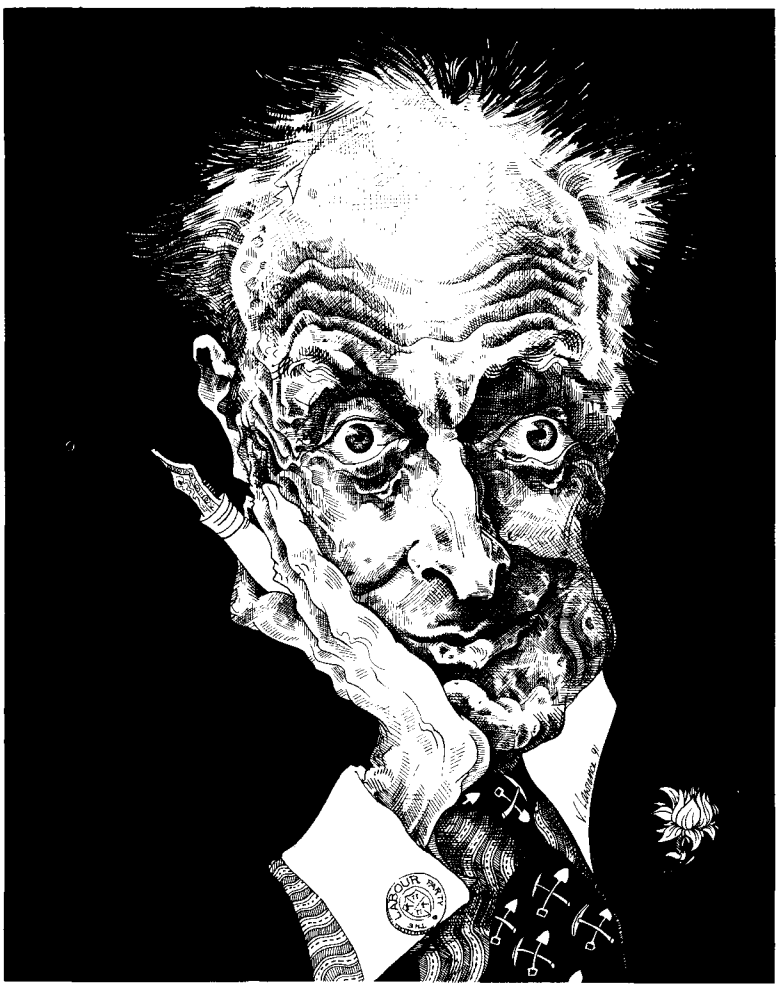
provider. And Kinnock and his able economic minister in waiting, John Smith, have been punctilious in avoiding firm promises of more public spending. But this is implicit in the Labour view of Britain, as promulgated in their latest policy document. They would reverse Tory initiatives to contract out services and introduce market mechanisms in public schools and hospitals. They would attempt to give new life to the concept of the state as a benign, enabling, "empowering" aid to the citizen in her constant struggle for a better life.

What we have here, if one could detach it from its tribal past, is something quite close to the party that Owen, Jenkins, and Williams were trying to invent. (The three have now all but departed the scene, Williams to a professorship at Harvard, Jenkins to grandee status in the House of Lords, and Owen to an uncertain future in the wilderness.) The Labour Party of today is certainly a party they would never have left.

But can Labour win? When Mrs. Thatcher was thrown out of office last November, Labour's first reaction was horror. She had been their favorite issue, and her availability for that role had masked the party's need to establish its own identity. At the beginning of his premiership, Major seemed greatly to strengthen the Tory future. But gradually the shift also benefited Labour. Kinnock, who had always been intimidated by Mrs. Thatcher, now looked to be in an equal contest. Two youngish, decent, middle-minded politicos slug it out on even terms across territory they largely share. For following Kinnock's move to the right, Major has moved the Tory Party leftward. In the quasi-presidential battle that must happen sometime before July next year, ideology will be picked over far less than personality.

In this prospective spectacle, Kinnock is not self-evidently a loser. His remaking of the Labour Party was a real achievement, calling upon personal as much as political resilience. He is famous for his hot temper, verbosity, and frequent vacuity. (Not long ago he landed in a hedge outside his house after an altercation in the street with some yobs who were shouting at his daughter.) But he is also a professional and dedicated politician, whose main problem is that he has been in opposition too long. Anyone who writes him off on that account might do well to consider the ridicule once heaped for similar reasons on two men who now are not exactly negligible figures on the world stage: Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand.



NEIL KINNOCK BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The government, moreover, has some blunders to answer for. Its poll tax, now cleanly abandoned in favor of a property tax, was a case study in political incompetence, and the economy, after the boom years of the 1980s, has undergone a steep, cyclical recession. The Tories' invincibility on economic issues no longer holds. Most polls now put the two parties neck and neck, and Labour—and the Liberal Democrats—made stunning gains against the Tories in the recent British elections. But for Labour to win, it has to secure a bigger turnaround than any opposition party has ever done. If it were to win a clear majority in Parliament, with the prospect of five years in power, it would signal not just a quirk of politics but a deep shift in the British temper: the true end of Thatcherism, the rebirth of social democracy.

It probably won't happen like that. A muddy outcome is more likely. The recent elections suggest that no party is likely to gain a clean victory. The ideological outcome is likely to be mixed as well. Majorism and Kinnockism each draw something from Thatcherism, but each also is a synthesis recognizably in touch with social democracy. Whatever happens, the mood of the '90s in Britain will be to the left of the '80s. For desperate Democrats, working a quite different system in a different country, it may offer an implausible model of political change. But it shows, at least, that some causes are never entirely lost. ●

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BOOKS & TheArts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Ancient Pride, Modern Love

Those who missed it or weren't around when it was first released in 1960 now have a chance to see **Spartacus** (Universal)—all three-and-a-half hours of it. Apparently inspired by the success of the *Lawrence of Arabia* rerelease, Universal engaged Robert A. Harris, who was in charge of the reconstruction of *Lawrence*, to do the same for this picture. About the restoration of previously omitted material, I can't comment after the lapse of thirty-one years, but the restored scene about which there has been most publicity—a veiled reference by a Roman patrician to his sexual tastes—must have been in the 1960 version that I saw because I referred to it in my review.

The screenplay was by Dalton Trumbo from a Howard Fast novel, two names that had been shadowed in the HUAC days. Since Universal implicitly asks for comparison with *Lawrence*, it seems fair to say that the *Spartacus* script is not in the same universe as Robert Bolt's for the other film. Still, its romance, between the slave-gladiator Spartacus and the slave girl who becomes his wife, is more amusing than ridiculous, just an obeisance to a genre convention. As for the grandiose libertarian sentiments that Spartacus utters, Trumbo and Fast, whether they knew it or not, were merely following a tradition.

The revolt of the slave-gladiators led by Spartacus in 72 B.C. was the subject of a blank-verse play, *The Gladiator* by Robert Montgomery Bird, presented in 1831 by Edwin Forrest, the first native-born American star, who played the title role. It was a success and remained in his repertoire for years. Democratic affirmations were part of Forrest's stock-in-trade in the new republic, and nothing in the current screenplay is more orotund and anachronistic than

> Man is heaven's work, and beggars' brats may 'herit
> A soul to mount them up the steps of fortune,
> With regal necks to be their stepping blocks.

It makes the Trumbo-Fast diction sound conservative.

In 1960 I thought more highly of Stanley Kubrick's directing and Russell Metty's color cinematography than I do now, but partly that is due to Kubrick's own subsequent accomplishments in *Dr. Strangelove* and (cinematically anyway) in *2001*, partly to *Lawrence* itself—David Lean's directing and Freddie Young's camera. Alex North's music for *Spartacus*—raucous Hollywood self-parody—is very much worse than Maurice Jarre's for Lean. In only one respect is *Spartacus* remotely comparable to *Lawrence*: some of Kubrick's actors are as good as all of Lean's. Peter Ustinov, as a slave dealer, is still masterfully comic in his slyly frank greed and cowardice. Charles Laughton, as a democratic womanizing senator, is at his cunning best. I never really believe a word that Laughton says, but I'm always mesmerized by his thaumaturgic power with words. And Laurence Olivier. To see him again as an arrogant patrician senator is to regret again—even more—that I never saw his Coriolanus, which he had done in two English productions before *Spartacus* was made and which was reputedly one of his best roles. Clearly he drew strands from his Coriolanus experience for the fabric of his performance here; to judge by photos, his makeup is the same. He is superb. (In one brief relooped sequence, his lines are dubbed by Anthony Hopkins, unobtrusively.)

Jean Simmons is no less charming than ever in the impossible role of the slave girl. Tony Curtis is still "a singger of songgs." Kirk Douglas, jaw muscles and all, still strives to energize the title role—to show, in a part written like a recipe, humor, tenderness, resolve, and nobility.

But *Spartacus* is a product, not a production, a spectacular product with thousands of extras in some of its battle scenes but never more than a contraption. The Hollywood vaults are full of such historical artifacts. Are they all going to be restored and released? I hope not. We couldn't expect all, or any, of them to be up to the *Lawrence* standard, so, ladies and gentlemen of the West Coast, some moderation, please.

Now to a small-scale entry. **Truly, Madly, Deeply** (Samuel Goldwyn) was produced by the BBC and has the look and sound of a British TV film—which is to say, it's neat, well acted, and literate. But *Truly* is a paradox because, though it's all those things, its story is sentimental slush, and old slush at that.

The writer-director, Anthony Minghella, is a tease. His dialogue is generally lithe and precise, and his subject promises us, for the first half hour or so, a bijou film of considerable import. A woman's lover has died suddenly, and

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Comfort of Strangers. *Eros and Thanatos in Venice. Harold Pinter's screenplay (from Ian McEwan's novel), Paul Schrader's direction, Christopher Walken's acting bring off this daring venture almost completely. (Reviewed 4/29/91)* **La Femme Nikita**. *Anne Parillaud is dazzling in this incredible but swift thriller—about an assassin for a sort of French CIA. (5/6/91)* **Journey of Hope**. *A Turkish farmer, wife, and child try to enter Switzerland illegally. Their odyssey, especially through the wintry Alps, is a stark epic. (5/13/91)* **Requiem for Dominic**. *The Romanian revolution, 1989. An amazing fictional re-creation made a few months after the event, as a man tries to clear a dead friend's name. (5/20/91)* **—SK**

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she is racked, almost demented, with grief. The quality of the writing and of Juliet Stevenson's performance persuades us that we are going to see an intense study—possibly inspired by Bergman—of Greek catastrophe in a London-flat distillation. But after our expectations are thus raised, Minghella brings back the dead lover. Still very much dead, he returns, fully embodied, plays his cello (this was his profession), cuddles the woman, and even summons some pals from the Other Side—apparently so they can watch the tapes on VCR for which they long.

The story then becomes one of the dead man's concern for his lover's welfare. He wants to wean her from her grief so that she can respond to another man who is pursuing her and thus go on with her life. This is the basic idea of *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) and its remake *Always* (1989), and it's related to the still-current *Ghost*. The odd contradiction is that, after the story goes syrupy, the dialogue remains crisp. (Except for the woman's predictable line: "I can't believe this is happening.") And the acting remains at its high level.

Stevenson, unpretty but very quickly irresistible, has perfect acting pitch. Her performance never wavers from absolute conviction, and it's so crammed with vitality and presence that what she says seems least of what she's about. Even when Minghella writes a cute scene, like one in which she and her suitor hop while speaking, she can carry it.

The other man is played by Michael Maloney, who was Rosencrantz in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* and the Dauphin in Branagh's *Henry V*, and is now playing Romeo for the RSC. He gives the role warm but modest earnestness. The revenant lover is Alan Rickman, who was Valmont in the RSC *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and has played heavies in some subsequent films. Here he has a chance to show tenderness and does it winningly.

Minghella has had considerable experience writing for British theater and TV and done some directing. This is his first film. Except for one immense close-up that jars, he handles it well, and he uses ellipses in a complimentary way—he assumes that we can supply what is left out, which we can. Next time, perhaps his screenplay will be as good as his actors. ●

Why Gorbachev is beside the point.

President Potemkin

BY TATYANA TOLSTAYA

I.

You have to be quite fearless, an adventurer, extraordinarily self-assured, to offer American readers a book about a country that you yourself do not understand. Gail Sheehy possesses all these qualities in abundance. As she correctly indicates, "A mystery is what no one knows. The Soviet Union used to be a nest of secrets. Now it's all mystery—even to its own leadership." A secret that's become a mystery is pretty hard to handle. Sheehy has written a book on the enigmatic president of a country that she has not studied, explaining the incomprehensible in terms of the unknown, and vice versa.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that she got tangled in contradictions at the outset, was tied up in knots by the middle, was hopelessly stranded by the end, and scrambled out after 400 pages into the index (which is nearly useless, because it seethes with mistakes), without having convincingly answered any of the questions that she herself posed.

The Man Who Changed the World: The Lives of Mikhail S. Gorbachev
by Gail Sheehy
(HarperCollins, 416 pp., $22.95)

Sheehy modestly refers to her book as "an X-ray of history," but it is not nearly so probing. If a medical metaphor is wanted, I would sooner compare what she has produced to a dermatologist's examination. It's skin deep.

The reader will learn a lot of surprising things from this book. For instance, that "diabetes is definitely a familial disease and would therefore be widespread in a closed ethnic society such as Russia, where people marry and reproduce, for the most part, with other Russians." Sheehy seems not to know that there really is no such thing as a Russian, genetically or racially; a more diverse people would be hard to find. (Besides, there are about 150 million of them.) The reader also learns from Sheehy that the "Peredvizhniki" (more commonly known in the West as the "Wanderers") were "a group of seventeenth-century Russian classicists," when in fact they were critical realist painters of the late nineteenth-century who broke with the Academy. (In seventeenth-century Russia there was not yet, nor could there have been, any such groups, nor any classicists.) The reader will also take away that Potemkin, one of Catherine the Great's favorites, was an architect, when his contribution to architecture, as is known, consisted of ordering the construction of decorative facades to hide the poverty and the destitution of Russian villages from the empress when she rode about the country to survey her lands.

The reader is also asked to believe that Russians hate Tatars, which supposedly explains the population's friendly dislike of Raisa Gorbacheva: "Because of her wide cheek span, she is believed to have Mongol ancestors, an unappealing feature in a society that bears undisguised hatred for the Tatar-Mongols stemming from Russia's long subjugation by both." This "both" is especially endearing, since really only one people is under discussion, not two. If, in her headlong plunge into Russian affairs, Sheehy had relied less often on the help of the KGB, the Central Committee staff, Party bureaucrats, and would-be mistresses of Gorbachev (what a pity that no real mistresses could be found!), then she might have observed a completely different picture. Russians love to talk about their Tatar heritage. Educated Russians will inevitably quote Napoleon, who is supposed to have said, "If you scratch a Russian, you'll find a Tatar." Cursing the historical, almost mythological Tatars, Russians will look for the mythological Tatar in themselves.

Russians take particular pleasure in self-disparagement. They like to rub salt in old, historical wounds. (The writer Bunin called this phenomenon being "moved by your own perdition.") Sometimes it seems that if it weren't for the Tatar-Mongol yoke (which lasted not 500 years, as Sheehy thinks, but about 300), the Russians would have nothing to talk about. Fusing self-abasement and pride is a Russian characteristic, well described by Dostoyevsky. Raisa Maksimovna's wide cheekbones are not her personal features, they are a trait typical of many Russian faces, which Sheehy could

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have noticed herself, and which Russians know perfectly well.

The number of illiterate mistakes in this book is beyond counting. I will enumerate a few of them, mixing the silly and the serious. There is no journal called "Banner and Strength" (*Znamia i sila*), but there is one called "Knowledge is Strength" (*Znanie—sila*). "Imenikirovna Sanitorium" is a chimera; it is the "Sanatorii imeni Kirova," or the Kirov Sanatorium, or the Sanatorium named after Kirov. *The Catcher in the Rye* was not "just published" in the Soviet Union; it was translated into Russian and published in the '60s, has been frequently reissued since, and is one of the most popular American novels in Russia (which says much about the Russian mentality). And there is this surprising sentence, which serves as an excellent test of Sheehy's competence in matters Russian: "For a thousand years—500 under the yoke of the Mongol-Tatars, and 500 more from Ivan the Terrible to Lenin—the Russian people had no experience of liberal democracy or economic competition."

Everything has been swept into this remarkable sentence, as if into a black hole: the pre-Mongol period; the first republic, Novgorod; the unification of the Russian principalities; the rapid growth of the country from the small kingdom of Muscovy to the giant that included the unembraceable expanses of Siberia (where there was no serfdom and economic competition abounded); the reforms of Peter the Great; the Decembrist uprising; the reforms of Alexander II; the emancipation of the serfs; Russian capitalism of the nineteenth century; and many, many more important things. Not to mention that the Tatar-Mongol yoke ended not with Ivan the Terrible, but 100 or 200 years earlier, depending on how you count. All in all, Sheehy seems to have trouble with math. She assures us that she was the owner of a 260-megabyte computer, which was worth only $350. As far as I know, computers of that capacity are used only in things like Star Wars. And she gave hers to her stool pigeon-chauffeur. Generous.

Almost all the proper names in the book are garbled. A single individual's name is sometimes spelled different ways in the body of the text, and in the index it becomes entirely unrecognizable. (Brezhnev's son-in-law suffers terribly: one time he appears correctly as the daughter's husband Churbanov and another time as her lover Cherbonov.) Scolding Russian society for its patriarchy and its oppression of women, Sheehy nonetheless doesn't bother to do Russian women the honor of spelling their names correctly, to say nothing of often changing their surnames into the masculine form, removing the feminine grammatical endings. I, too, have the misfortune to be mentioned in Sheehy's book, and my surname is also misspelled. Worse, a conversation is ascribed to me that actually happened in a different place, at a different time, and under different circumstances than Sheehy describes. She may not care how she presents me, but I do: my story about how I interceded with the editors of a journal on behalf of certain young poets who were rejected as insufficiently traditional is transformed into a story about how I supposedly begged to be admitted to the Writers' Union. In the Soviet Union we have always believed that Americans are legendary for their work ethic, their honesty, their sense of responsibility. Now I wonder.

Sheehy would seem to be closer to the mark when she writes that "for seven decades under their Marxist masters [Soviets] have been isolated from the civilized world, forbidden to travel to the West and insulated from the great currents of social, political, economic, and spiritual thought." Well, almost. Those seventy years that everyone talks about now—everyone who wants to simplify things, to straighten out history and dump everything on the Bolsheviks as everything was previously dumped on the Tatars—were a complex and heterogeneous period. It was possible, though it was difficult, to travel to the West until about 1928, so ten years can be dropped right away. And limited travel (for a particular kind of person, at particular times, and at the price of fantastic humiliation) became possible again after 1956. So there's another thirty years to be dropped, or at least qualified. It adds up to quite a difference. And it should not be forgotten that in the '20s and '30s some Western influence did exist. In those years the most influential Western politicians, writers, and philosophers visited the Soviet Union. They arrived in a country swathed in barbed wire, surveyed the Kremlin tables heavy with caviar and cognac, and heartily exclaimed on the wonderfulness of communism. They preferred not to hear the half-stifled moans of the victims.

This book, in short, is not to be trusted. It doesn't even hold together as a book, though Sheehy's pretensions to having created something monumental are clear from her title, *The Man Who Changed the World.* We are given the World, and the Man (Gorbachev), and the author, who has broken through the KGB's cordons and made it to the hero's hometown, so as to see the hero's mother, his neighbors, his chickens, and his classmates, all with her own eyes. Breathlessly, she broke through. Breathlessly, she looked. And with what did she return? Nothing much. Was it worth all that investigative zeal just to discover that Misha had two grandfathers, and that one of them spent time in prison and the other sent people to do time in prison—a typical Soviet biography that sheds no light at all on our hero's personality and achievements?

It is true that Sheehy displayed a certain stubbornness and cunning in getting to a village to which others don't have access; but her feats and her accomplishments occupy a central place in the first half of her narrative. The reader is offered long and allegedly exciting stories about how Gail thought that Sergei might inform on her, but it turned out to be Oleg who informed. What a surprise! I can assure Sheehy that she was informed on by Oleg *and* Sergei, and by Arkady and Pyotr and Ivan (if she met anyone by these names), and by another couple of dozen people who smiled and helped her; and by Sergei Ivanko (an old, renowned villain whom Vladimir Voinovich made the subject of a great satire), to whom she expresses her gratitude in the introduction. Her chauffeurs informed on her, as did her maids, her translators, her neighbors, and certainly Gorbachev's villagers; and they informed not out of any evil intent, but mechanically, indifferently, as a matter of course. And those who were not actually required to inform couldn't help it, anyway: their apartments, their telephones, and their automobiles were bugged, the Moscow apartment that Sheehy inhabited was bugged, and so was the apartment of her kindly neighbors, from whom the naive and tactless Sheehy tried to borrow an egg (which, under current Russian conditions, is something like borrowing change from a beggar's cap because you're too lazy to go to the bank).

Please do not ask me for proof of this mass informing. I may assert that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening without appealing to astronomical theories. This is the way things are. And everyone knows this: every single step, every look, every breath of an American reporter who's trying to unearth the details of the personal life and the murky past of the No. 1 Man in the Soviet Empire is observed, recorded, and filed in a dossier. To expect that Soviet people will tell the truth to such an American reporter is ridiculous. Some will and some will not; and you'll never know who is telling the truth because without knowledge, experience, and informed intu-

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ition in a society like Soviet society, you can't learn anything.

Still, Sheehy has a theory, of which she is very proud. Her theory, as is well known, is that people pass through several "lives" within their lifetimes. Or, in a word, they undergo "passages." Sheehy has no compunction about transporting this dubious flight of American pop psychology to the Soviet Union. Thus Gorbachev is supposed to have undergone a transformation into a reformer, or a revolutionary, or something. (For some reason Sheehy fails to apply her theory to Raisa Gorbacheva.) Did Gorbachev change the world or did the world change Gorbachev? Sheehy calls this a "philosophical riddle," and boldly takes the second hypothesis as her point of departure (thereby refuting the title of her book). Never mind that at least 2,000 years ago the Romans noted that the times change and we change with them. But let us even grant that a "philosophy" underlies the "riddle." The important question is whether, as a result of Sheehy's "philosophy," we will be enlightened about these changing times, about the processes that have taken place in Soviet society during the seventy years of its existence.

Now our country possesses certain peculiarities that verge on the fantastic, and its inner geometry is decidedly non-Euclidean. Our roads are Möbius strips; our parallel lines cross as many times as you like; the sum of the angles of our triangles is infinite. You knock a hole through the wall of the fortress and you find yourself inside a swamp; the wall didn't actually enclose anything. Russia is an accursed but bewitching place. It has its own logic, which the most intelligent Russian people have been unable to explain. All they could do was describe it, weep over it, and pray for it.

Sheehy appears in Russia, however, brimming with confidence, a self-proclaimed philosopher and a self-satisfied sociologist. Like Cuvier, who recovered the image of prehistoric animals from a single bone, she tries to reconstruct Russian society from random shreds of evidence. But she doesn't know how to distinguish a bone from a boulder, and instead of full-blooded and frightening dinosaurs she produces an impossible bestiary of talking hens and fish with eyeglasses. After visiting one market, for example, she asserts that Soviet markets are "open-air stalls . . . operated by migrant sellers from the Central Asian republics." In fact, most Moscow markets are covered pavilions where people from all over the country sell their wares—from the Ukraine and the Caucasus, but mostly from the Moscow area. For that matter, things are often sold through surrogates, or fake "communal farmers"; the goods are frequently stolen from state stores, since they can be sold at the markets for ten times the price. And to keep everything under wraps, bribes are paid to the police, the Party secretaries at all levels, and so on, upward and upward until the money reaches—guess who?

Sheehy tells us that she decided to live in the Soviet Union just the way that Soviet people supposedly do. To this end, she pockets the salt and pepper given out with breakfast in the airplane, though I wonder how many days she planned to get by on this quantity of spices. It's a nice detail—except that Soviet people, when they steal, steal by the wagonload. If a train full of goods stalls in a provincial station, whole brigades of thieves will appear, open the sealed doors with experienced hands, and carry off every last item. Sometimes the guards and the station manager help, too. They take hundreds of thousands of rubles worth at a go, sometimes millions, depending on what the loot is. If you want to live like us, my dear, you better get used to our scale of operations!

Interpreting the behavior of Russian people, Sheehy ascribes motivations to them that are based on her own hastily conceived errors and homegrown theories. In this, of course, she is not alone. It has become fashionable, for example, to rebuke Russians for their indignation at Raisa Gorbacheva's behavior: male chauvinists, that's what they are. It doesn't occur to Sheehy that, unlike the American president, who is elected freely by at least half the voting population, our president, or general secretary of the Communist Party, is elected by nobody. He lands on our heads all by himself, with all his stupidity, his tactlessness, his dishonesty, his shady past and unpredictable decrees. If *he* is unavoidable, however, like rain in autumn, or like old age, or like fate, *she* is not. If he has won the right to torment us (and Russians don't doubt that the authorities exist solely in order to torment) as the result of a long, dirty struggle with other, weaker tormentors, she has not.

Raisa jabs at us—robbed, humiliated, and half-imprisoned people that we are—with her well-manicured fingers decorated with diamonds bought with our money. She screeches at us with a mouth that has tasted countless delicacies, while our children are half-starving. This woman can elicit nothing but intense scorn. She didn't struggle for power with anyone, she received it as the result of luck, happy circumstance, and

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now she sets out loudly and shamelessly to make use of what she has not earned. Instructing whole peoples and republics on how they should behave, she reproaches children in the Baltics for speaking their native language instead of Russian, and she tells the Ukrainians that their capital, Kiev, is a Russian city, because "that's what's written in the textbooks." If the president had, say, a brother who traveled everywhere with him, screamed, gave orders, made scenes in museums and instructed the professional staff on what they should and should not do, took over state culture as though it were his own property, got himself a gold credit card and bought diamonds with the taxpayer's money, the reaction to that man would be precisely the same as the reaction to this woman.

As befits the product of a tabloid mentality, Sheehy's book is lousy with "big names." Andropov's son and Brezhnev's grandson touchingly discourse on the problems of the Soviet mafia as if it were something to which they had no relationship. The excited American correspondent comes to the conclusion that " 'organized crime' is indeed an oxymoron in the Soviet context. Crime is no more organized than agriculture." A big mistake: criminal activity is extremely well organized in our country. It's organized on the lowest level, from the pickpockets and the train thieves, to the highest level, where, in essence, the whole government is stolen, all rights and all freedoms are embezzled and handed out to people piecemeal, in the form of privileges.

"When did Gorbachev find out that socialism doesn't work?" Sheehy asks anxiously. The answer is simple: he knew that nothing works while still in his mother's womb. That's why he embarked on a Party career. Such a career was the only way that he could find for himself a warm place within a dysfunctional system—a dangerous place, perhaps, but a privileged one. "Who suggested the idea of glasnost to him? Who first began talking about perestroika?" Another anxious question. Sheehy sets out to guess, naming first Gorbachev's boss and patron Fyodor Kulakov, then Raisa. It never occurs to her that not only the ideas of "glasnost" and "perestroika," but the very terms themselves, have a history more than 150 years old.

In the correspondence between the Russian revolutionaries and emigrants Herzen and Ogarev, in the middle of the last century, we read about hopes for "glasnost" and "perestroika." Russian writers, revolutionaries, and dissidents of all parties and all periods have ceaselessly talked about the necessity of reform and of freedom of expression—with variable results. Herzen and Lenin and perhaps Saltykov-Shchedrin (the nineteenth-century satirist who described the vices of Russian society and Russian psychology so exactly that his works could have been written only this morning) would have been required reading for the Gorbachevs at university.

In fact, Sheehy patronizes Gorbachev, painting the picture of a witless provincial whose "older comrades" or wife taught him everything. She patronizes him by thrilling over his ability to quote Pushkin or Lermontov, not knowing that each and every Soviet schoolchild is forced to learn poems by heart (and prose as well!) over the course of ten years of schooling. It's a bit like exalting Gorbachev for knowing his multiplication tables. And she patronizes him by calling him a "master strategist" merely because as a young flatterer he was able to carry off the most banal sort of manipulation: he ordered his assistant to lose at billiards to a high-placed official and thus gained the official's good graces.

There is no need to exclaim over the enigma of Gorbachev's soul just because he tells the Soviet people that "I am a convinced Communist" and then tells Margaret Thatcher that he is no longer a Communist. No theory is required for an explanation. It's quite simple: he says whatever will go over better with the listener. (If he had said the opposite, now *that* would be truly inexplicable.) Similarly, it would be curious to consider why the general secretary of the Communist Party was ashamed of his title and decided to call himself president, after the Western fashion. After all, there are grander appellations that would have been closer to the truth. The answer, again, is simple. The term "president" soothes the Western ear, and creates a subconscious image of democracy, a foggy vision of legitimacy. It brings free elections to mind. A president may receive loan credits more easily than a general secretary. It's no wonder that President Bush keeps repeating that President Gorbachev is resolved "to continue to move along the path of reform and perestroika," despite the obvious meaninglessness of such claims.

In order to arrive at "the truth," Sheehy has used all possible sources: honest and dishonest, clean and unclean. She has questioned intelligent people and idiots, the experienced and the inexperienced, without, it seems, being able to distinguish one from the other. There is not a trace of a critical attitude toward her material. Instead there is her trite theory of "passages." There are moments of intelligence scattered about the book, and occasionally we are given the observations of people who understand the situation well, but they are lost in a sea of ignorance and preconception.

II.

And yet there remains the really important question. Why did what happened in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s happen? Or better still, what *did* happen? Of all the theories current in the Soviet Union to explain the events of the last six years, I have a favorite. It is that the Kremlin got hungry.

If every morning, at the moment you awake, food appears before your open, waiting mouth, then you won't change a thing. You will think: "All is well. Glory to labor." You will eat your fill, and turn over on your other side and go back to sleep. If one fine day, however, nothing appears before your open mouth, you will wake up. Surprised and annoyed, you will swing your legs over onto the cold floor and you will look for the reasons for this catastrophe. And when you see that the fridge is empty, and that there are only crumbs left on the table, and that the canned goods are gone, besides which the toilet is broken and the garbage disposal stinks, you will begin to wonder what's going on. Where did that food come from in the first place anyway? What can be done to make it come back?

Sometime around 1985, the general level of collapse in the Soviet Union had reached such staggering proportions that reform could be expected at any moment. The Soviet historian Andrei Amalrik, who immigrated to the West (and soon after died in a car crash), wrote a book called *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* Many of his prophecies have come true, not least his timetable. The country survived until 1984, but it could no longer exist as it was. Everything contributed to this: the unbelievable corruption, the complete moral disintegration of the government and the people, the hopeless economy, the defeat in the Afghan war.

The dissident movement, which had begun in the 1950s merely as an expression of dissatisfaction with the regime, grew in size and in strength throughout the '60s and the '70s, taking different forms—from religious groups to armed plots, from samizdat to social escapism. By the mid-'80s the dissidents, those who were engaged in the struggle for human rights, and in the distribution of forbidden political tracts and prohibited literature, were reduced to very few, since nearly everyone who was the least bit ac-

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tive was either in prison or had emigrated. But there was almost no need for the dissident movement anymore; everyone else had already been enlightened. (The authorities, too, were enlightened: dissident literature was much more accessible to them than it was to regular people. KGB agents sold dissident works, made money on them, and then informed on the buyers.)

The official economy kept on collapsing, and nobody knew what to do about it. Entire branches of industry, especially in the southern and Asian republics, were transferred (secretly) to private hands; a lively and effective capitalist economy, the so-called "black market," emerged through the official but nonfunctioning structures. Remember that business in our country was criminally prosecutable. Prison or the death penalty awaited a major businessman, who therefore required the services of a Party bureaucrat to cover him, to "legalize" his underground activity. If the business failed, or if the deal fell through, it was the businessman who suffered, and the bureaucrat simply moved on. This system of unsinkable Party bureaucrats, this caste of people with immunity, is called the nomenklatura.

What happened in Brezhnev's time was that the number of bureaucrat-ideologists shrank and the number of bureaucrat-businessmen (that is, of corrupt people) grew. And that was just fine. The ideological Communist is a danger to humanity. Certain of his rightness, and confident that he can remake the world, he is an ascetic who demands asceticism from those surrounding him. He is proudly devoid of human weaknesses, such as the love of eating, buying, falling in love, relaxing, and just doing nothing. Nor does he permit others to have them. He wants to subordinate all of humanity to himself, since all people are brothers; and he will stop at nothing.

The corrupt Communist, by contrast, knows that he is a petty thief, and he recognizes that other people also want to steal. He loves comfort, and he recognizes that others love it, too. He will not start a nuclear war with the West because it would destroy all those warehouses with all those goods. And the best thing about the corrupt Communist is that he doesn't give a damn about others. He's too busy with his own affairs. He will pay attention to you only if you get in his way. The ideological Communist, however, thinks about you constantly: you are his nourishment, you are the clay from which he will sculpt the human being of the future.

The corrupt Communist knows that he is a nobody, but he really really wants to live well. In a situation of free competition, he would most likely lose out to the businessman, the farmer, and the intellectual. Therefore he works out a system of privileges, so that access to all the blessings of the world belong only to the chosen. Occasionally he will reward the obedient slave, perhaps with a trip abroad (that is, to the magical kingdom of consumer goods). According to the rules of the game, however, the slave must pay for this upon returning: he must tell those who are not allowed out that everything is quite awful abroad, that people everywhere are out of work, are scavenging in garbage heaps and killing each other on the streets, where they also sleep. (This is rather like the medieval Arab traders, who, afraid of competition, spread rumors that a "sea of gloom" lay west of Gibraltar.) These people are naturally bound to each other by a round robin of bribes and base actions. There is a file on each of them, and they all know it.

It is obvious that Gorbachev belongs to the corrupted segment of the Partocracy. He is supposed, however, to be a "true Communist," with socialism in his heart and his blood, who cannot allow the introduction of capitalism (though he can take advantage of its fruits on his trips abroad). A faithful student of Lenin, he cannot allow private ownership of land (though he can live for free in luxurious villas at our expense). As if we didn't know that the main Leninist trait is the lack of scruple. As if we didn't know that Lenin became disillusioned with socialism and introduced the New Economic Policy, that is, he returned to capitalist principles.

Gorbachev introduces elements of a free society, then forbids what he himself has made possible, depending on who leans on him the hardest. It is pretty clear by now that he doesn't have an opinion of his own about most matters. By habit, he defended a one-party system; and when society pressured him and demanded multiple parties—please, be my guest, it's up to you. And last fall he began "liking" the Communist Party and its affairs once again. This lack of principle has even given birth to the myth that Gorbachev deliberately says the opposite of what he means, that he is secretly in sympathy with the liberals but is afraid to say so openly, and so he hints, winks, gesticulates, speaks in riddles. Only recently has it become apparent that Gorbachev doesn't care about the intelligentsia, as he doesn't care about any other class of society.

It is wrong, I think, to suppose that Gorbachev thought up the reforms and was only waiting for the opportunity to begin remaking a totally unsuspecting society. The necessity for change in the Soviet Union was felt by everyone. The universal impossibility of continuing to live half-starved under the cover of the old dogmas was putting pressure on the authorities. But the old guard was still alive and strong. In 1982 Brezhnev died. Then the other dinosaurs started dying. After Stalin's death, people shed genuine tears; after the deaths of Brezhnev and Andropov, people laughed; after Chernenko's death, they guffawed. And how could they not? A man comes to power, declares himself a genius, and kicks the bucket.

When Gorbachev fought his way to the throne, however, or when he was placed upon it by his colleagues, he changed tactics. He began to play the simple, earnest, democratic fellow. He removed all the posters from the streets and—this amazed everyone—removed all the meaningless announcements about the greatness of the Soviet people, all the pompous idiocies like "The Party is our helmsman," "You are walking the true path, comrades," "Glory to the CPSU," "The Party is the Mind, Honor, and Conscience of the People," and so on. Gorbachev didn't hang his own portrait (and thus the portraits of the lower echelon bosses automatically disappeared). He started traveling around the country and "meeting with the simple people." The simple people weren't used to such honors; they had been spat upon or punished for decades.

It doesn't take much to warm the soul of a tortured human being. I remember a radio broadcast of Gorbachev's "meeting with the people" in Siberia. "Maybe you need some help with something, comrades, what do you say," he asked in a domestic, caring, "fatherly" voice. And in reply there came this soul-splitting cry from a woman in the crowd: "Felt boots for my child! Size 22 felt boots!" To which Gorbachev retorted, "We'll work, and life will straighten itself out, comrades," as he has preached many times since. Gorbachev would also visit the apartments of ordinary people, supposedly without warning, though they say that the day before the unexpected visit detachments of unknown people would run in and quickly renovate the premises and equip the amazed hosts with good dishes, a gilded samovar, and rolls that had long since disappeared from the shops. (After Harun al Rashid's departure, however, the samovar and the cups were taken away.) And he visited schools, which were also renovated overnight, and plants and factories, which had been cleared of drunk workers and suddenly decorated with flowers.

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The art of erecting Potemkin villages has not died in our country. Good traditions die hard. When Richard Nixon came, all the houses on his way to the Kremlin were freshly painted, and one building, a particularly old-looking one, was torn down and a little square was made in its place. At night truckloads of grassy, daisy-covered turf were laid down to cover the empty space. Since then the popular name for this plaza has been Nixon Square. And Ronald Reagan has no idea how personally grateful I am to him for coming to meet Gorbachev in Moscow. They painted my building (only the facade; the backside was left as it was) and renovated the church that stands in our courtyard (the one that Sheehy, incorrectly once again, describes as "newly working," when in fact the church still contains a warehouse, an archive, and a typesetting plant) and carted off the garbage that had been there for three years (the hulls of rusted cars and two old sofas).

The rumors that Gorbachev had descended from the clouds and was wandering among us mortal folk gave us hope. Previously they just yelled at us: "You can't!" "Don't you dare!" "Don't go there!" "Stop it!" "You're under arrest!" Suddenly there appeared an affectionate, smiling, understanding man with words of greeting: "Yes, my dears, I know how hard it is for you. But be patient, and you'll get your felt boots." And he came in spring.

April, May, June, dreams, hopes! The refuse heaps blossomed with yellow flowers. Lonely old women stirred in the crypts of communal apartments. ("Only one toilet for forty-eight rooms," as Vladimir Vysotsky sang.) One-armed war veterans crawled out into the sun to sell old galoshes and copper door handles stolen at night from the entryways of old buildings. Drunks also moved out of their apartments into the gardens to drink their half-liter bottles in a threesome amid the lilac and the tulips. (Do you know how to divide a bottle evenly in three parts, when you only have one glass? You don't know anything! In each half-liter bottle there are twenty-one "glugs," and there are seven "glugs" in a glass. That's how it's always been, and that's how it will always be. What do we care about wars, revolutions, Reformations, Renaissances, elections, oil crises, sexual revolutions, stock exchange crashes? Gulp down the seven glugs in a glass among the lilac bushes and fall asleep to the song of the sparrows, for a thousand years. And if there's nothing to nibble on, to wash down the drink, then we sniff our sleeve, which is why—just in case—we never wash our jackets.) At the markets and flea markets, around the few churches that still function, holy fools, prophets, and enchanters seduced the crowd with a new myth: Mikhail the Marked One had come, on his forehead there was a sign, his appearance was foretold in the Bible. God had given him seven years, and then he would fall, and once again there would be gloom and war and desolation.

The people sang, drank, and composed myths, while the intelligentsia sat at their televisions and their jaws dropped to their knees: the new ruler was getting rid of the old government. Almost every day another minister went, almost every week another Party secretary. Nobody knew why he was doing this, and each class or group chose to understand it in its own way. The intelligentsia decided that its voice had been heard at last, and that the Party system was being dismantled. The Partocracy was confused and petrified with fear. The people decided that you didn't have to do anything or be afraid of anyone.

This was a very important moment for Gorbachev: he had to decide on whom he could rely. He chose the intelligentsia, consciously or intuitively. It was a brilliant move. First, no czar in Russian history had ever done this. Second, satisfying the demands of the educated class-

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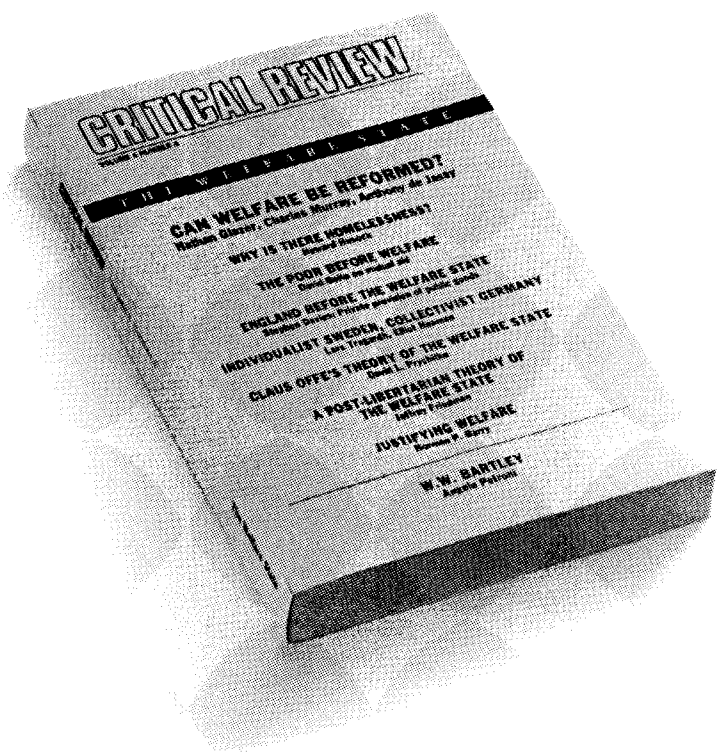

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es, demands that they had formulated long ago and had been insisting on for years, was quite simple. And they weren't really asking for much: freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of movement, the freedom of elections, respect for human rights. That was all. No goods had to be produced. It was clear, moreover, that all these freedoms would serve to reinforce Gorbachev's role. How could he refuse to yield such trifles? And how he was loved for these concessions!

He played a different game, however, with the Partocracy. Accustomed to fawning before higher-ups and to pressuring their subordinates, accustomed to doing nothing concrete, to producing a lot of empty talk, they were shaken from their usual rut by the very mystery of what was happening. They were so baffled that it was easy to sweep them from their posts. When someone has fainted, you can quickly throw them out the door.

There remained the question of the people, an unknown quantity. Who are they, and what do they want? For the last thousand years nobody has been able to answer this question. Gorbachev's advisers informed him that the people were drinking in the lilac bushes and were completely covered in sparrow droppings. And who would feed the Party? Not the intelligentsia! Who really needed the intelligentsia, anyway? And here Gorbachev made his first, and perhaps his most serious, mistake. He forbade the people to drink.

The intelligentsia forgave him this (they were "moved by their own perdition"). The Partocracy was happy. Here was a concrete task, and a familiar one: to fight, to root out, to fire people from their jobs. They set to tearing out grape vines, paving over rare vineyards in the Crimea, uprooting muscat so fine and so expensive that "the people" couldn't get near it. They only counted the monstrous losses when the campaign was over. During the campaign, however, the people cursed Gorbachev, bought up all the sugar, perfected their knowledge of moonshine manufacture, and most important of all, grasped that they could do everything their own way, and not get caught or punished. An epidemic of hoarding began. Sugar, soap, matches, and light bulbs disappeared, and then sheets and pillows, and then clothes, shoes, eggs, and finally bread.

Gorbachev couldn't do anything about any of this. He kept meaning to straighten everything out, but he was busy creating the image of a peacemaker in the West. I don't waste too much time over the question of why Gorbachev (or his advisers at the time) made peace with the United States and let go of Eastern Europe. I consider these things practically: if they let it go, it means they couldn't hold on to it any longer. Eastern Europe was what we call a "suitcase with no handle": hard to carry, but a shame to leave behind. It must have become too heavy to carry. It was also hard to hold together the essentially collapsing Soviet Union, hard to repeat again the empty slogan "The Party is our Helmsman" when nobody was listening.

People die because they grow old. They grow old because they have lived a long time. Communism died because it had lived a long time, degenerated, and grown weak; not because Gorbachev had a willful grandmother, or because Raisa whispered "Free the people, darling" into her husband's ear, as Sheehy would like to imagine. There is much less of Gorbachev's will involved in everything that has happened in our country than is usually thought. Having chosen a Party career from the start, he aspired to rise as high as he could (although he probably didn't count on reaching the position of general secretary; but then each soldier carries a marshal's rod in his backpack, as a French proverb says). And having ended up on top, he tried to hold on to the position he had gained.

We do not yet know who proposed Gorbachev for the top and who supported him (our analysts now think that it was the military-industrial complex), but his initial behavior, when you look back on what happened, bears the mixed traits of boldness and indecision, ignorance and a fine knowledge of human nature (in its Party version), recklessness and cold calculation. Having grown up under conditions of Brezhnev's stagnation, Gorbachev knew his small world and the people in it extremely well, and supposed that he knew how to change it. But he did not know the larger world and its problems; and when he destroyed the habitual structures with his own hands he ceased to understand his immediate surroundings, and took one false step after another.

He is, really, a fit object for pity: a provincial individual who received a bad education at a bad time, was later the all-powerful boss of a mineral waters resort, and servant and nanny to the Moscow bosses; a man who knew more about the sick, gurgling intestines of the authorities who came to cure their innards with the sparkling waters than he did about the actual life of his tormented country. He didn't handle well—how could he have handled well?—the chaos that he created when he let the genie out of the bottle. He couldn't handle the stubborn, cunning, patient people, who were used to deceiving far more difficult customers than the paunchy chatterboxes that descended for a minute from the gilded heights to advise the people to "work better" and then disappeared again into the palace beyond the clouds, surrounded by a triple wall with armed guards.

After his first mistake came his second, and then his third. He betrayed the intelligentsia. Having received every imaginable (and unimaginable) support from it, having become the first ruler ever supported by the intelligentsia, which historically has opposed every regime, Gorbachev decided that he was strong enough, and grew deaf and blind to the demands for freedom and respect for human rights that the intelligentsia never tired of presenting to him. And he betrayed the businessmen, major and minor, a live force capable of leading the country out of its economic dead end. He appealed to people who knew how to work, who had initiative and wanted to better their lives with their own hands. He let them believe in justice, and published laws, and promised that these laws were genuine; and then six months later he annulled them, and burdened businessmen with absurd, punitive taxes. Most important, he poisoned the public against the businessmen, pointing to them as the reason for the country's ruin. His actions in regard to "cooperatives," questions of privatization, and "monetary reform" (the recent confiscation of the people's money) were a mockery.

He set the army against himself, antagonized the generals and then gave in to them, when they were already annoyed. He antagonized the officers and didn't give these disfranchised, dependent people anything in return. He turned all the republics against him by speaking ambivalently about independence and then using tanks to suppress all attempts to acquire this independence. He angered the West, his only real support, with all of the above. But the most important thing is that he turned the simple people against him, those who are now hysterically supporting Boris Yeltsin, those whose stubborn, cunning psychology, whose changeable, superstitious, and unpredictable personality he thought he could disregard.

The simple man, daydreaming for centuries in the lilac bushes, opened his eyes and reached for his bottle, only to find that his bottle had been taken away. He looked around and saw that he was surrounded by the same old dirt, horror, and ruin, that the lilac was covered with

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the thick soot of industrial waste, that the sparrows were radioactive, that babes in arms had become thieves and adolescents had become murderers, that whole trainloads of girls were setting off to the cities to become hard-currency prostitutes.

And then, from behind the Kremlin's battlements, the simple man heard a drawn-out cry: "Hey, people! Don't drink, work! Work, 'cause we're getting awfully hungry in here!" They want to e in the Kremlin. But they want the people to provide the food for nothing. For a long time "their" policy was growling and barking. Since 1985 they've changed tactics: smiles, charm, laughter. Previously no one ever saw "their" wives (it was embarrassing to show those morose behemoths in brocaded bags to enlightened humanity). Now an elegant lady in Parisian outfits can even help the cause, assist in the procurement of credits, most-favored-nation status, food parcels.

The trusting and well-wishing West seized the bait, and as yet it doesn't want to let go. In a letter sent to a Soviet newspaper, an enthralled American wrote to suggest that the beleaguered Gorbachev abandon the Soviet Union, receive American citizenship, and run for president of the United States "We'll all vote for you," he promised. Well, president is perhaps a bit much. The role of governor, however, might suit him—governor, let's say, of the state of Idaho. The handsome, warm, smiling, well-dressed, well-spoken Misha would look marvelous. But Americans might never see potatoes again.

—translated from the Russian by Jamey Gambrell.

The American Dilemma

By Thomas Byrne Edsall

The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How It Changed America by Nicholas Lemann

(Knopf, 410 pp., $24.95)

There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America by Alex Kotlowitz

(Doubleday, 324 pp., $21.95)

The West Side of Chicago, Houston's Third Ward, Harlem, Watts, Roxbury, Detroit: the core of virtually every major American city has become a mine field. Questions of race, values, rights, and community responsibility raised by the plight of the black urban underclass have depleted the energy, the vi lity, and the solidarity of liberalism. And liberalism, and with it the Democratic Party, has left unattended the most serious challenges to the legitimacy of activist, interventionist government. The epidemic of violent crime, social disintegration, welfare dependence, drug abuse, and unemployment that emerged in the aftermath of the civil rights movement has sabotaged the repeated efforts of the Democratic Party to compete in presidential elections.

Nicholas Lemann and Alex Kotlowitz have written books that confront America's devastated urban terrain, that aggressively report on the most painful issues before the public today. And yet both books fail to recognize fully the tragedy of their own message.

Lemann argues that the experience of sharecropping in the Mississippi Delta undermined the ability of a substantial number of blacks to move from slavery to equality. Sharecropping created a culture and an economics of failure. Sharecroppers, paid in plantation commissary script and often in debt by the end of the year, depended on white planters for survival in ways that are now replicated by welfare dependency. Black sharecroppers were propertyless, and the exploitation of blacks was a cornerstone of white planter prosperity. Segregation provided a legal foundation essential to the sharecropping system, and whites sought to justify segregation by pointing to the social disorder rampant among sharecroppers. "The family lives of sharecroppers were, for the white people of the Delta, Exhibit A in their case that segregation was a necessity," Lemann writes. By the start of the 1940s, Lemann argues, the precursor society of today's black urban underclass was firmly established in the plantation communities of the Mississippi Delta, then the national center of illegitimacy, violent crime, and female-headed households.

The Promised Land begins with a masterful reconstruction of the migratory revolution that was a consequence of the development of a cost-effective mechanical cotton picker in the mid-1940s. Lemann chronicles the forced march North during the 1940s, '50s, and '60s of rural blacks pushed off the land as machines replaced field hands, and as white plantation owners abandoned the blacks they had exploited for generations. The stream of blacks leaving the South—there were 1.5 million between 1910 and 1940—became a torrent. Five million black men, women, and children moved north during the next thirty years.

Lemann describes the often inadvertently destructive responses of well-meaning liberals and urban planners to the flow of humanity—at its height, as many as 2,000 people a day—leaving the cotton fields of the Delta for the slums of a rapidly deindustrializing Chicago. Struggling to assimilate hundreds of thousands of the unskilled poor, the city built massive high-rise apartment buildings in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Robert Taylor Homes, twenty-eight identical, sixteen-story buildings constituting the largest public housing project in the world, largely define the universe of the project's 40,000 residents, including the central character of the book, Ruby Daniels Haynes, along with her daughter Juanita, her daughter-in-law Connie, the men they love, and the children they bear.

In telling Ruby Haynes's story, Lemann documents the family structure of the very poorest of the poor, the multiple liaisons that produce child after child in a world financed by episodic work, welfare, food stamps, and public housing. It is a world in which fathers disappear, go to jail, and occasionally reappear, often with new partners; in which male children turn to crime in extraordinarily high numbers; and in which female children follow their mothers into early childbearing.

Lemann's narrative weaves back and forth between Clarksdale, Mississippi, and Chicago, with a long central section

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on anti-poverty policy-making in Washington during the Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon years. Ruby Haynes was a sharecropper until she was 22, and left Clarksdale in 1946 at the age of 30, divorced and already the mother of two children fathered by a married man. Working episodically in Chicago in a laundry and as a janitor, she had six more children by three different men, the last of whom she married in order to qualify for admission to the Robert Taylor Homes. In 1965 her marriage broke up, and the next fourteen years of her life were spent on welfare, in the rapidly deteriorating housing project, as the lives of all her children except one became increasingly scarred by alcohol, drugs, out-of-wedlock births, and emotional stress. Ruby's return to Clarksdale in 1979 at the age of 63 has brought her some peace, but no real satisfaction.

For such a woman, the civil rights era had little direct relevance. It is one of the central ironies of the civil rights movement that its very success contributed to the breakdown of the institutional structures of the inner city. Desegregation of jobs and housing opened doors from the ghetto, and middle-class blacks stepped through them. The underclass is, in this sense, the detritus of reform. Lemann reveals the striking absence of mediating social welfare institutions within the inner city—institutions that flourished in Chicago during an earlier migration, the influx of 500,000 blacks to the North during World War I. In *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*, James R. Grossman describes negotiations conducted by the Urban League and the YMCA between white management and black labor. There was a common interest between the black middle class, which still lived in the inner city, and corporate employers in promoting community cohesion by encouraging the formation of such organizations as the Morris & Company Glee Club, the Industrial Baseball League, choral societies, and the Wheatley Association, which helped women migrants find secure homes.

Successful men and women left the ghetto. And the exodus of the middle class created a vacuum, particularly of stable, working men whose presence in the neighborhood helped to counter the effect on children of fractured families and female-headed households. Kotlowitz explores the desperate need for just such men. His book transcends the journalist's professional distance to capture, with extraordinary empathy, the struggle toward adulthood—without reliable, competent male role models—of Pharoah and Lafeyette Rivers, two young brothers who live in Chicago's Henry Horner Homes, a small, West Side project of the same generation as the Robert Taylor Homes. Caught in a world of random violence and despair, these two boys (they are 9 and 12 when the story begins) aim above all to escape what Cornel West has described as "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness." Intensely involved with the Rivers family for more than four years, Kotlowitz poses, by his very involvement, a fundamental question. His great love for Pharoah and Lafeyette has transformed Kotlowitz himself into the antidote to nihilism. How can such deep personal commitment be legislated or replicated on a vast public scale?

Kotlowitz's book is intimate and descriptive, and it steers clear of larger policy questions. Lemann engages with public policy, and much of his book is an assessment of the failure of the federal government to create livable center cities populated by employable, well-schooled citizens. The long middle section of *The Promised Land* is an account of the destructive competition between Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy, of appointees seeking special advantage to promote unworkable agendas, and of the breakdown of the capacity of the political system to anticipate and prevent policy failure.

Lemann describes Johnson as a president who was driven to win the respect of the liberal, intellectual establishment, but who was at the same time blind to the divisiveness of a poverty program that mandated the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor. He presents Willard Wirtz as bureaucratically inept, a secretary of labor who proved incapable of persuading the administration to back a massive jobs program, the approach Lemann clearly thinks would have been most effective. And he traces Daniel Patrick Moynihan through two administrations, implying that Moynihan was an opportunist, correctly recognizing that if Moynihan had included in his now famous "report" a list of actual recommendations, white liberals and the black left would have had far more difficulty dismissing the Moynihan findings as an exercise in "blaming the victim." Because of Moynihan's rush to get his argument before the public before concrete proposals could be attached, the Johnson administration missed an opportunity to make good use of a mine of new information that supported the case for a major expansion of employment geared largely to black men.

Lemann provides the general outline of a government-based public agenda, and a substantial criticism of anti-poverty programs he believes to have failed, particularly the Community Action Program. His analysis draws useful attention to the preconceptions and the false expectations of the liberals of that era, and it unwittingly exposes some of the underlying problems of contemporary liberalism in dealing with questions of race and social policy.

Lemann argues that the War on Poverty was a political failure primarily because it made enemies of local elected officials. To support this view, he cites the conflicts between black insurgents and white mayors in cities as diverse as Buffalo, Chicago, and Oakland. But in attacking the Community Action Program, and "ghetto development" policies in general, Lemann carries his criticism too far, charging that such initiatives "presumed a link between political empowerment and individual economic advancement that doesn't exist." In fact, conflict between local black leaders and white elected officials, exacerbated by the Office of Economic Opportunity, was inevitable in the late 1960s and early 1970s as blacks wrested political control from whites in city after city.

The important issue was not that racially loaded hostilities emerged, but that the context in which such conflicts took place was changed by them. Anti-poverty programs distorted white-black struggles for power by creating bases for the formation of black candidacies and black political organizations outside of the existing local political structure. The result was that black political insurgencies often took an aggressively adversarial stance toward local political organizations, viewing them as targets for destruction rather than as opportunities for takeover.

The attack on traditional political organizations signified the failure of blacks to take full advantage of the link between political power and patronage, including not only city jobs, but a new set of business interests: contractors, insurance providers, architects, engineers, municipal bond counsels—the local commercial enterprises profiting from public-sector decisions. These politically dependent enterprises have been a bedrock of Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Polish social and economic development in cities and states where those groups took power. In Baltimore, for example, the poverty program became the power base for the substantial faction of local black political activists headed by Parren J. Mitchell, who went from executive director of the Baltimore Community Action Agency to become Maryland's first black congress-

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man. But the Mitchell wing of the local Democratic Party subsequently neglected the job and contracting patronage functions of city and state government, with the result that black constituents were deprived of control over substantial government spending.

To suggest, as Lemann does, that community action was a conceptual failure because it "presumed a link between political empowerment and individual economic advancement that doesn't exist" is wrong. Political power is an essential part of any effort to address a central weakness within poor communities, which is the lack of an entrepreneurial, wealth-generating sector. The rate of business formation among blacks remains far lower than the rate not only for whites, but also for Hispanics and other minority groups. Affirmative action and minority contracting set-asides, the methods currently used to promote black employment and business development, are highly divisive. Surely political patronage, with its deep roots in the American political tradition, is a far less controversial mechanism for directing public monies to disadvantaged populations.

Though skeptical of community action programs designed to empower the poor, Lemann places extraordinary faith in the federal government. He believes that it can "break the hold on individuals of those aspects of ghetto culture that work against upward mobility." He advocates a $10 billion to $25 billion boost in domestic spending for such programs as Head Start, an expanded Job Corps, intense intervention in inner-city schools, the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) prenatal and infant nutrition program, the distribution of birth control devices in high school clinics, and a CETA-like government jobs program. And he describes with a broad brush "programs that come under the banner of 'intervention,' in which the government becomes a guiding presence in the lives of the ghetto poor."

Lemann is sharply critical of what he calls "ghetto development" strategies and policies. These initiatives—enterprise zone tax incentives, tenant management of public housing, community development corporations, school choice—were, in some cases, once liberal dogma, and they have now become part of the Republican "empowerment" strategies. At the core of Lemann's attack is a recognition that most black advancement has not taken place within center city ghettos. "The impressive record of black success in America's cities since the 1960s has been almost entirely bound up with leaving the ghettos rather than improving them," Lemann argues; and the key for much of this departure was the acquisition of government jobs.

The merit of his proposals notwithstanding, Lemann is guilty of a huge liberal leap of faith: the assumption that a portrayal of ghetto life "honestly presented and openly discussed could . . . set the country aflame with a sense of righteous purpose." This is ancient rhetoric, and it is vitiated by the very story that Lemann has set out to tell. Lemann has failed to come to grips with the central dilemma of post-1960s liberalism, which has hurt or put in jeopardy the well-being of precisely the people its programs were meant to help, not just poor blacks but also blacks in the middle class. As the post-War on Poverty era has shown, dependence on the federal government can be a precarious route to follow, since continued and adequate funding of programs requires the assent of the electorate. The very social disorder that Lemann describes as commonplace among the residents of Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes—out-of-wedlock childbearing, welfare dependency, pregnant mothers addicted to cocaine, endemic crime, paternal abandonment—has forced to the forefront of the national policy debate a confrontation between liberals and conservatives over values and rights.

This confrontation, in turn, has split the traditional liberal coalition down the middle, and has driven the country sharply to the right. The presidential wing of the Democratic Party—the wing that has been most outspoken in endorsing the rights revolution—has been unable to absorb the resulting moral, cultural, and racial conflict. Instead, these conflicts have produced a golden opportunity for the Republican Party, and for conservatism more generally, to promote a values-based right-wing populism, and to consolidate the support of key white working- and lower-middle-class voters, support essential to the construction of a majority coalition in presidential elections.

Not only have the behavior patterns that Lemann describes provoked a conflict over values that has damaged liberalism; those patterns have themselves challenged the legitimacy and efficacy of liberal initiatives. During the 1960s and 1970s, when the civil rights movement produced the broadest reforms in the nation's history, and when social spending to fight poverty, to improve schools, and to feed the hungry rose sharply, the rates of crime, unwed motherhood, welfare dependency, and chronic black urban unemployment also began to skyrocket. These trends posed a dilemma that continues to plague what can broadly be described as the American left.

At the same time, a disproportionate dependence on government jobs—over half of the blacks with professional and managerial-level jobs work for the government, compared with just over a quarter of such whites—has, in turn, imposed significant costs on middle-class blacks themselves. For this dependence has profound political ramifications. It has left the black community vulnerable to the ideological vagaries of the electorate, and voter attitudes toward the public sector have become increasingly vulnerable to conservative and Republican racial polarization strategies that capitalize, in

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part, on the fact that government employment is increasingly black. Black middle-class dependence on government employment dovetails with disproportionate black use of government welfare services.

These two forms of dependence on government have resulted in ever more racially polarized views about basic questions of governance, ranging from social service spending to housing policies to the responsibility of the federal government to provide jobs. The very concept of an activist federal government has developed a racial cast that has impeded the restoration of a coalition supportive of taxing and spending policies beneficial to those in the bottom half of the distribution of American income.

The division among American voters over the role of government has been exacerbated, moreover, by another central tension of the last twenty-five years: the extension of the broader rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (a revolution conducted primarily in the courts) to poor people in the nation's ghettos. Liberal advocates of the poor, challenging policies that had once coercively and repressively maintained social order, forced the elimination of regulations governing behavioral norms—that public housing tenants be married, for example. The revolution extending rights to the poor, including the right to refuse menial labor and the right to bear children out of wedlock with no loss of taxpayer-financed support, collided with the values of working- and lower-middle-class voters. The political victim was liberalism.

This conflict of values has created a vicious circle. Behavior patterns within the underclass alienate and anger working-class and middle-class voters. The right to such behavior—free of state interference—has been, at least until recently, supported by cultural liberals; and conservatives have discovered that the conflict between the subsidized poor and taxpaying voters is a political gold mine.

Whites in flight from increasingly black center cities have changed the structure of American politics; suburbanization is powerfully reinforcing the chilling effect on policy of conflicts over rights and values. Unless there is a dramatic change in demographic patterns, the election of 1992 will be the first in the nation's history in which suburbanites cast an absolute majority of the votes. A majority of the electorate, overwhelmingly white but including a substantial number of middle-class blacks, now lives in government jurisdictions that are separate from the cities where the poor are concentrated.

This new suburban majority feels very little pressure to deal with the problems of poverty, making the prospects for enacting effective—or expensive—government initiatives bleak. Suburbanization, in tandem with the continuing conflict over race, rights, and values, has cast a dark shadow over chances for improving the lives of children like Pharoah and Lafeyette. Lemann and Kotlowitz have opened up a moribund debate in which the participants have grown increasingly bitter, but the underlying balance of political, economic, social, and demographic forces are arrayed formidably against innovative or effective public action.

THOMAS BYRNE EDSALL is a political reporter for *The Washington Post*. His book, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, will be published this fall by W. W. Norton.

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Complete Collected Stories by V. S. Pritchett

(Random House, 1,232 pp., $35)

V. S. Pritchett was born in 1900—"as old as the century," as he put it in an autobiographical essay—and that fact, ninety years later, seems to give him a kind of authority, as though he were himself the century and spoke with its voice. That accident of dating may partly explain the scale and the tone of the publicity in the English press that attended his birthday last December—the interviews, the biographical sketches, the copious reviews of his collected stories. It may even explain the size and the weight of the volume, which is more like a small monument than a book.

In a sense, this view of Pritchett is right: he has given a voice to the English life of his long lifetime. Though he has been a traveler, his subject has been England, and his voice, even when he wrote of other places, has been as recognizably English as the Old Kent Road or toad-in-the-hole. Not all of England, though; as those humble comparisons suggest, his imagination has been best nourished by the most ordinary parts of English life. Reading his stories right through, as I have just done, is like traveling on the London Underground—a long journey, perhaps on the Northern Line, from Kennington, south of the river, up to Pritchett's own stop at Camden Town. So many ordinary-looking people; so many apparently ordinary lives. And yet, as one looks at them (surreptitiously, because the English don't like being stared at), how often they seem to slide away from ordinariness, to hint at lives that are anything but normal.

Pritchett is the great recorder of the almost-ordinary English world. His characters belong to the nation of shopkeepers. They are small businessmen on the edge of failure, dealers in leather or upholstery, salesmen, office workers, publicans, a baker, a dentist, a furniture-mover, a window-cleaner. They live in the less fashionable parts of London, or in dreary suburbs or provincial towns, and they meet in public houses, in shops, in hospital waiting rooms, in town and city streets, in the commuter trains that carry them to their gray jobs, and in the gray houses that they return to. Those places define their lives: ugly, contingent lives in which belonging is being a commercial traveler in a pub, and intimacy is a quarrel or a misunderstanding. "Society needs writers to enrich its knowledge of itself," Pritchett once wrote. His achievement has been to enrich his society with knowledge of its poverty, and to do so with a calm attention: comic sometimes, but rarely satirical or angry.

The life that he has written about is the life that he has known. "Imagination grows from indigenous roots," he says; and though that may not work as a general principle, it is certainly true of him. But you would have to add that the roots in his case were meager and impoverished, and that one of them was rootlessness. Pritchett told the story of his early years in his autobiography, *A Cab at the Door*: how the family was always on the move, from Yorkshire to London, and then around London and its suburbs as his eccentric father's business fortunes

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rose and fell; how they drifted up and down the economic scale from poverty to relative prosperity and down again; how they had no friends, no manners, and no taste, and belonged to no social class, but lived with and on themselves, like some grotesque family in Dickens. And how young Victor was taken from school when he was 15 and thrust into a drudging job in a Dickensian warehouse, not from necessity but simply because the family wished it.

An Englishman without money, a public school education, or family connections is without three powerful friends when he enters the adult world. When Pritchett set out on his own, he was nobody: an intelligent witness to the world's reality, but invisible. Perhaps that is why his stories are so empty of an authorial self, why he disappears so entirely into his characters. "Throwing something of oneself away is a way of becoming, for the moment, other people," he wrote in "As Old as the Century," "and I have always thought that unselfing oneself, speaking for others, justifying those who cannot speak, giving importance to the fact that they live, is especially the privilege of the storyteller." But I think the process was less voluntary than the old Pritchett made it; that he entered the world of storytelling without a self to throw away, with only a voice to speak for the other invisible and powerless people of his world.

Pritchett would add one other factor in the making of his special condition as a writer: his flight from England to the Continent when he was 19 or 20, and the seven years that he spent there and in Ireland. (The story of those years is in *Midnight Oil*, the second volume of his autobiography.) Those years abroad didn't make him less an Englishman: he didn't begin to sprinkle his prose with Gallicisms, or go on about bullfighting, or join the IRA. But his natural role as invisible observer was confirmed and strengthened by existence as a foreigner, and though he returned to live in England, he came back as an outsider. And so he has remained: a witness to his time, b. from the edge.

Perhaps it is that position on the margin of things that accounts for the absence from Pritchett's stories of elements that one might think critical to such a witness. Politics, for example: Pritchett has always been a man of the left, yet there are no political stories in this volume. History: he lived and wrote through the Second World War, but the issues of that war are never voiced, only its effects on a few ordinary people caught in the London bombings and the

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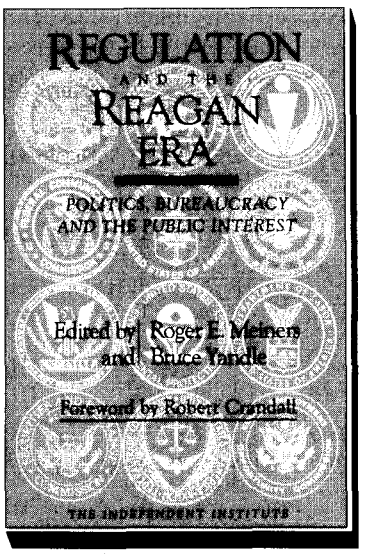

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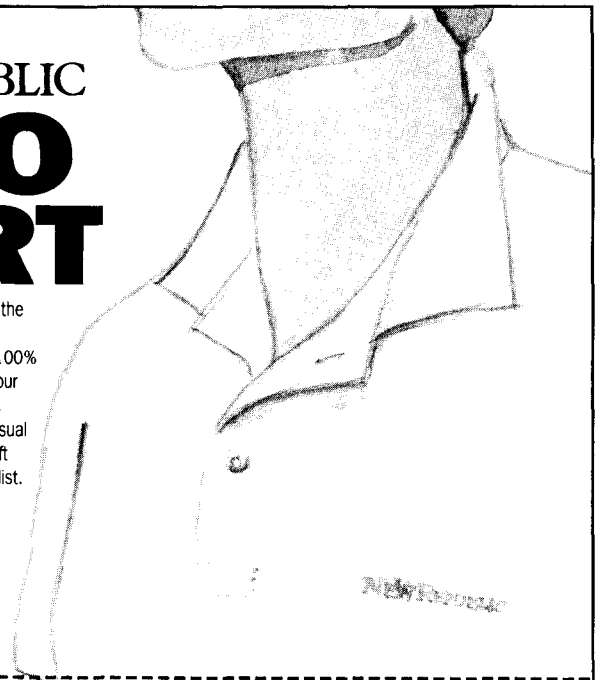

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food shortages. Sex: there was a sexual revolution in Western society in Pritchett's lifetime, but not in his stories; sexuality in his work is what it has always been, the oldest human way of getting into trouble.

Religion seems an exception to this general avoidance of the Great Issues. Pritchett does deal with it, but in a special way. It was a stroke of luck for him that his father, a great taker-up of cults, should wander at last into Christian Science, and drag his son along with him. Another religion—the Roman Catholicism of Graham Greene, for instance—would have been of no use to him. A comic writer needs a comic church, if he has any; and Christian Science provided him with a religion so bizarre in its beliefs and so unaesthetic in its practices that it provided a subject for delighted mockery. And so we get "The Saint," one of Pritchett's best and funniest stories; but we don't get religion, not really.

Politics, History, Sex, Religion: How can a writer be the voice of his century, of this century, without treating those subjects in a full, fortissimo way? Pritchett has managed it by letting them slip into his stories as they slip into our ordinary lives, in oblique and undramatic ways, coloring events and causing problems, but always as a part of the world in which the story happens, never full frontal.

The word that Pritchett habitually uses for his role as a fiction writer is storyteller. It's a modest, unpretentious term that implies a humble social function: someone who tells his society tales of its ordinary life. Society derives a kind of security from such tales; but so, clearly, does the teller. In *A Cab at the Door*, Pritchett tells how he and his brother were sent to school in their father's cut-down trousers, and how they felt themselves a race apart, and longed for the normality they saw around them. Pritchett found that normality not in life, but in prose fiction: "In prose," he wrote, "I found the common experience and the solid worlds where judgments were made and in which one could firmly tread." When he began to write, and to make his own solid world, he chose the common experience as his subject. Or didn't even choose: had ordinariness thrust upon him by his longing for normality.

Here are the opening lines of "Sense of Humor," one of his best-known stories, and the one that stands first in the *Collected Stories*:

> It started one Saturday. I was working new ground and I decided I'd stay at the hotel the weekend and put in an appearance at church.
>
> "All alone?" asked the girl in the cash desk.
>
> It had been raining since ten o'clock.
>
> "Mr. Good has gone," she said. "And Mr. Straker. He usually stays with us. But he's gone."
>
> "That's where they make their mistake," I said.

The conversation of a commercial traveler and a hotel clerk: What could be more ordinary than that? It's as flat and boring as a wet day in Lincolnshire: traveling-salesman prose. Or another example, from "The Aristocrat":

> It was at two o'clock and after a good lunch that Mr. Murgatroyd went into The Prince of Denmark and took his stand four-square and defensive against the bar. The time was seven past two by the clock above the bottles, but by his gold watch, which he slipped out of its chamois case, it was two. He remarked upon this to Mrs. Pierce, the publican . . .

Saloon-bar prose: ordinary people in a pub. Or this, from "The Necklace":

> Saturdays, in the season, I used to pack up the job early and go home to my dinner, and when Plushy came round—my mate, Plushy Edwards—we would go off. We'd both been playing for the Rovers a couple of years.

Window-cleaner's prose, that one. The point of these examples is the ventriloquism being practiced, the polyphonic Pritchett becoming his characters, populating his solid world with real but unimportant people, and with solid, exact particulars.

As you enter Pritchett's world, however, it begins to shift and tilt. The ordinary becomes surprising, comedy skids into violence, the aristocrat is a thief, the window-cleaner isn't. Odd characters turn up, doing odd things. Noisy Brackett and his wife pursue each other in fast cars through country lanes; the Rev. Hubert Timberlake lets Error in, and sinks slowly into the Thames; a drunk in a dinner jacket does stage-falls at a banquet. Normality is not predictable, the ordinary is not to be trusted.

Something similar happens in the style of Pritchett's prose. It seems plain, and properly so, for a correlation between a world and its words is something we expect from our writers: ordinariness should sound ordinary. But not *too* ordinary; the medium shouldn't disappear into the subject, writing should celebrate itself as well as the world.

In Pritchett's writing there has always been that element, the "spell of language" that has ruled him, he says, since he was 10. His first book, *Marching Spain*, is full of the purplest prose: noiseless dusk comes down like a sweet veiling incense, a Ford car stamps and bellows, the scented music of the dusk flows in. The spell is evident in the early stories in sentences like these:

> It was a slow morning, slow with the sun, slow the tide opening its fan of water in the creek, slow the hours and slow the breeze.

> Clerks flung their lives about and committed follies. One married to a voracious wife drank on Thursdays a glass of stout. One who copied weighing slips gave imitations of the voice of the cashier. One who was bald put his hand down the blouse of his secretary and was slapped in the face. One would absent himself for twenty minutes in the morning to read the newspaper in the lavatory. One going deaf turned to an Oriental religion.

A young writer stoned on words is teaching himself how to raise his prose above the level of naming, and to fill it with the life of language. In his later years Pritchett has deplored the excesses of that young man's style, but they are amiable faults. If you take chances with the High

Advanced Civilization

You posed in the center of my room, by the fire,
and I ate you. You were easily available, a feast
of commodities, a big red apple of desire.
Afterwards, I felt no need to be released

From your complex comments on the direct touch
of the wallpaper, from your hot, sloppy denials.
O, I would have walked through walls, in profile, on a crutch
just to watch them unfurl your flag of smiles.

Now the day is over and all the obscure
merchants must return to their childless golden beds
while I lumber up the mountain to the pure
clouds of autumn where we lay our lovely heads.

Terence Winch

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Style, you will occasionally escape the gravitational pull of ordinary discourse and float off into verbal weightlessness. Other good writers have done it: Conrad wrote sentences that are like listening to a seashell—nothing but lovely sound. And Pritchett has gone on taking chances. A character in "The Speech," a relatively late story, has "a dark, prompt electric black mustache, like a too recent political decision." It's like a Lewis Carroll riddle: How is a mustache like a political decision? How, indeed. Such verbal flourishes occasionally go over the edge into meaninglessness, but they are vitalizing elements in the prose.

When Pritchett began to write, just after the First World War, his goal was to be a man of letters. It seems a quaintly old-fashioned notion (who younger than Pritchett merits that title now?), but in those days it was a possible dream, for the great Edwardian examples were still around and in full production, men like Chesterton and Belloc and Bennett, who could write about anything, turn out a poem or a novel, a review or an essay, criticism or history or personal advice as required, and do it well. Pritchett belongs in that company. He has written novels and stories, travel books, biographies, and a steady stream of reviews and critical essays. He is the last of the Edwardian men of letters.

One consequence of this professional engagement with literature has been, perhaps, to make him more conscious than most writers of the traditions to which he belongs: one, the line from the great Russian and French storytellers, Turgenev, Chekhov, and Maupassant; the other, the native English tradition, stretching back from Lawrence, Coppard, and H. E. Bates in his own time to the great Victorians, and especially Dickens. Perhaps his sense of these ancestors has made him conservative in his practice; perhaps if you have enough great models you are less likely to innovate, or to minimalize. Certainly one feels, in Pritchett, the continuity not of method only, but also of assumptions about the world and how we know it—the assumptions that constitute literary realism, that the world is there to be known by the senses, as actual and substantial as stones.

The man-of-letters role also assumes an audience, and here, too, Pritchett seems different from many of the writers who have come after him. His stories address not the members of an avant-garde, or academic critics, or other writers, but common readers, the sort of people he reached with his weekly pieces in *The New Statesmen*. They assumed that he would be intelligent, interesting, and comprehensible; and he assumed that they would be there to read him. The expectation of such a relationship, between a literary writer and a stable audience of literate readers, is not easily taken for granted now. But without that relationship, can there be writers like Pritchett in our future?

In the last story in the *Complete Collected Stories*, a writer named Pearson (which is close enough to Pritchett) goes to an exhibition of a portrait photographer's work, and thinks as he leaves: "A man in the image trade, like myself." Pritchett has been in the image trade for more than sixty years, and the images he has made of his times and places have made him famous. Let us not celebrate him for his longevity or his fame, as though he were already a bronze Sir Victor on a pedestal in Regents Park. Praise, rather, the living image-maker, who has added to our century's reality by telling us stories about it.

SAMUEL HYNES is the author most recently of *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (Atheneum).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

help a company's bid for a contract.

Mr. Kinsley also charges that the fact that I am black influenced the Federal Communications Commission's approval of the sale by NBC of a radio station to a group in which I have ownership. In fact, minority ownership was not a consideration in the FCC process. Only in instances involving comparative hearings for new broadcast licenses, or in distressed or forced sales of broadcast licenses, is minority ownership a factor. The NBC sale of the station was a conventional sale and thus did not fall into either of those categories. I bought and paid for the stock I hold in the station at fair market value.

Prior to assuming the chairmanship at the Democratic National Committee, I built a successful practice—first for the National Urban League, representing the interests of minority and poor people, and over the last decade as a partner in a prominent Washington law firm—and I'd like to believe that I earned that success through solid preparation, strong advocacy skills, and hard work. Although I remain a partner in my firm (as have previous chairmen of both political parties), I've turned over client representation to others for the very reason that I wanted to eliminate even the appearance of the impropriety that Mr. Kinsley suggests.

RONALD H. BROWN
Washington, D.C.

Michael Kinsley replies:

It is beyond honest dispute that Ron Brown and his associates got the radio station because they are black, which is what I asserted. The seller, NBC, had promised a black pressure group it would sell one of its radio stations to blacks, and got a large capital gains tax break for doing so. The fact that the station did not change hands in a "comparative hearing" is irrelevant. Extra points for minorities in comparative hearings are just one FCC reverse discrimination policy. The capital gains break is another. Mr. Brown claims to have paid "market value," but refuses to say how much, exactly, he paid. To have paid full price, when the seller was getting a tax break specifically for selling to you, would be remarkably stupid. And no one has ever accused Ron Brown of being stupid.

I did not "insinuate" that Mr. Brown "became affiliated" with the sludge company "in order to assist" in getting the New York City contract. One point of the column was that the influence trade is not so crude. What I insinuated was that having a prominent black Democrat on the board is useful to a company that sells sludge contracts to big city governments. Mr. Brown doesn't deny my real insinuation.

Ron Brown registered with the Justice Department in 1982 as a foreign agent for the Sultanate of Oman. This was reported in Pat Choate's book, *Agents of Influence* (Knopf), and Mr. Choate has shown me a copy of Ron Brown's signed registration statement, for which I thank him (Mr. Choate, that is). Mr. Brown's law firm represents the imported car dealers; it was wrong to say that he personally represents them.

If, as Mr. Brown says, he has "turned over client representation to others" at his law firm, what exactly does he do there? "Client representation" is, after all, what law firms do. If the firm is paying Mr. Brown simply to be on its letterhead while serving as chairman of the DNC, that would prove my point rather dramatically.

Axis to grind

To the editors:

In "Atta Turk" (April 15) Amy Schwartz, referring to the breakup of the Ottoman empire after World War I, states that it had "fought on the side of the Axis" in that conflict. She meant, of course, the Central Powers; the Axis was not formed until the mid-1930s. Indeed, Rome, one pole of the new axis around which the political world was supposed to revolve, had actually been an opponent of the Central Powers, and thus Turkey as well, in World War I.

HARRY LAZER
Washington, D.C.

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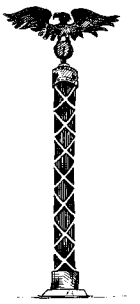
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Venial sins

I KNOW A SUREFIRE WAY TO SPARK cynicism in Washington: mention the public embrace of religion by Secretary of State James Baker and President Bush. In 1990 Baker surprised most of Washington by speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast. Bush, on the night the air war began in the Gulf, invited Billy Graham, the evangelist, to spend the night at the White House. The next morning they went to church together. I take both events at face value as public expressions of Christian faith in times of stress. But believe me, mine is the minority view. Almost everyone except practicing Christians thinks Baker and Bush exploited religion for political gain. And even a few Christians are dubious of their motives. What's my point? That religion's crucial role in the lives of many people, including Baker and Bush, is rejected out of hand by the political community, especially the press. This is crazy, all the more so because polls show how religious most Americans are. Nine out of ten in a new Gallup Poll say they've never doubted the existence of God. Nonetheless, reporters are indifferent to spirituality and its impact on folks whose every political twist they cover. Religion has become, as D. Patrick Miller wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, "the blind spot of American journalism." A fresh example: the obits of Malcolm Muggeridge, who died at 87 last November. The obits stressed his first career as a caustic, irreverent journalist. Yet they all but dismissed his second career, after conversion to Christianity, as a writer on Christian themes. Muggeridge's journalism may have been fun to read. But his Christian books, notably *Jesus Rediscovered*, influenced millions and changed lives, mine included.

I WENT TO TWO FORMAL AFFAIRS recently, the White House Correspondents' Association annual banquet at the Washington Hilton and a state dinner at the White House for Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro. Except for the tuxedos, they couldn't have been more different. Reporters pride themselves on being down-to-earth. But the correspondents' dinner consisted chiefly of what Republican consultant Jeff Bell calls "elite bonding." The crowd was homogeneous: the press, their sources, and the politicians, including President Bush, they write and talk about. It was an orgy of self-satisfaction. At the White House affair, however, diversity reigned, and not just because a lot of Nicaraguans came. Actress Teri Garr and race car driver Ernie Ervin sat at Bush's table. My wife, Barbara, sat at a table with Alexis Arguello, the boxing champ and contra. She could look past Arguello, a real Rocky and Rambo, and see Sylvester Stallone at the next table. Stallone's girlfriend, Jennifer Flavin, sat next to Brent Scowcroft, Bush's national security adviser. Later I asked Scowcroft what they talked about. He said her modeling career, movies, the usual stuff. Why was I there? No, it wasn't because Bush insisted. Three or four journalists are invited to every state dinner. That night my number came up.



A LOT OF WASHINGTONIANS LIKE to tout the city as cultural mecca, a gourmet's delight, a hotbed of sophisticated social life. I don't think they really believe it. Now Washington wants to be taken seriously as a great sports town. A local group has recruited a band of investors and applied for a National League baseball franchise. If league officials give Washington—and not Miami, Denver, or Tampa—a team, they're fools. Washington is a lousy sports town. Only one team draws, the Redskins of the National Football League. Their popularity is a fluke. Washington's hockey team, the Capitals, has a cult, but not a mass, following. The pro basketball team, the Bullets, attracts pathetic attendance, except when a star like Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson comes to town. Then the crowd cheers wildly for the visiting team. Washington has lost two baseball teams for lack of attendance, one moving to Minneapolis in 1961, the other to Dallas ten years later. Fans argue that those teams were losers, and that a winning baseball team will draw here. But the true test is if a losing team can pull in crowds. Washington, in sports as in politics, hates losers. A losing team only gets support in a real sports town, i.e., one with a large working class. Washington has an upper middle class, a clerical middle class, and the poor. Baseball people know this, which is why Washington shouldn't hold its breath on getting a team.

READING *THE COMMANDERS*, BOB Woodward's well-reported book on how President Bush and his aides decided to go to war with Iraq, made me wonder again about Washington's obsession with disagreements among top officials. One of the themes of the book is that Bush and his advisers didn't always agree. General Colin Powell favored a containment strategy in which Bush would stick with economic sanctions for a year or two. Secretary of State James Baker was a latecomer to hawkishness. OK, so what? Ultimately everyone in the upper reaches of the Bush administration went along with the war decision. Powell, the dove, vowed in public to cut off the Iraqi army and "kill it." Disagreement in policy-making is normal. If everyone agreed from the start, that would be real news. It wouldn't get much coverage, though. Reporters like to write about feuds and fighting among officials. I certainly prefer a good feud story. Maybe the White House could turn the tables on this by announcing, day to day, how every senior official stands on every issue. Reporters could track disagreements. They'd lose interest and begin digging for the real story, the secret agreements among officials, which are, invariably, more interesting and tell you more. For example, the agreement among Bush and his foreign policy advisers that Israel, but not Saudi Arabia, should be pressured for concessions to spur the Middle East peace process.

POLITICIANS THINK THEY CAN avoid damage for an indiscretion, so long as they get their story out first. Not so. Chuck Robb, the Virginia senator, released the full transcript of a two-hour NBC interview about his meeting in a hotel room with a beauty queen and attendance at drug parties. The idea was to put his own spin on the story before NBC broadcast a show about Robb. The trouble was, this didn't alter the NBC show. It merely attracted attention to it—and to parts of the interview that weren't broadcast. Mike Allen of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* scoured the transcript for new tidbits and came up with many. For instance, Robb made a theological point about his indiscretion. "I'm an Episcopalian," he said. "But if I were a Roman Catholic . . . they have mortal sin and venial sin—not venal, venial—venial being the less important sin. Anything here falls in that category." Good point, senator, but you'd been better off saying nothing at all.

FRED BARNES

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A view from Washington

Truck-Trains: A Public-Policy Issue

Very soon, Congress may be asked to consider legislation that could forever change the face of transportation in this country.

Some elements of the trucking industry hope to use federal highway reauthorization legislation as a launching pad for the widespread use of giant "truck-trains," some almost half a football field long and weighing as much as 135,000 pounds.

Needless to say, the railroad industry opposes this plan for reasons of all too obvious self-interest. But the railroad industry is not alone in opposing the widespread use of longer combination vehicles (LCVs), as these monster trucks are known. Other groups—groups that have no particular affinity for railroads—also oppose their use; and they oppose them for reasons that have nothing to do with rail self-interest, but a great deal to do with the public interest. These groups include environmentalists, highway safety advocates, public interest groups, insurance companies, state government officials, and even elements of the trucking industry itself.

The LCV issue cannot be considered in isolation. Rather it must be considered in the context of national policy and needs.

The nation requires an efficient freight transportation system for economic growth and national prosperity. While the nation has such a system today—a system that's the envy of the world—that system is showing serious signs of strain—and most of that strain is exhibited on the highways.

Road congestion and highways in need of repair are costing the U.S. economy tens of billions of dollars annually. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimates that some $100 billion annually is needed to upgrade the highways and keep them in good repair. In contrast to the sad state of highways, the U.S. rail system is in the best physical shape in its history. It is also vastly underutilized.

Railroads pay the full cost of their rights-of-way. But today's rail competitive trucks are heavily subsidized, paying only about half of their cost responsibility for pavement deterioration and nothing toward the indirect costs associated with congestion, pollution, and safety. That subsidy has been estimated at about $9,500 annually per truck—or almost 8 percent of rail-competitive truck costs per ton-mile.

That subsidy would grow if LCVs were to become the rule nationwide. It is estimated they would pay as little as one-fifth of their cost responsibility. Other highway users—and perhaps the general taxpayer—would be asked to pick up the difference.

At the same time, the nation is struggling to loosen its dependence upon foreign sources of energy. Here, too, railroads can help. On average, railroads are three times as energy efficient as trucks. Even the most efficient of trucks use twice as much energy as double-stack trains (trains in which one container is carried atop another on rail cars) to deliver a ton of freight. Again, national interest would seem to dictate a greater use of railroads.

Yet another national priority is the environment. And again, the national interest would seem to lie in making greater use of railroads, since—on a ton-mile basis (one ton moved one mile)—railroads put about one-third as much carbon monoxide into the air as trucks, one-third as much nitrogen oxide, one-tenth as much hydrocarbon and one-tenth as much diesel particulate.

Concerns over energy and the environment are reasons why environmental groups such as the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and the Friends of the Earth oppose LCVs.

For many Americans, however, the greatest concern is highway safety. That concern is well-founded and is shared by the men and women who drive heavy trucks. One poll by the American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation of drivers in four states where LCVs are currently legal found that almost 70 percent of the drivers felt that LCVs were less safe than shorter combinations.

This concern over safety is the reason why the Teamsters Union, the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, the AAA, and such insurance groups as the American Insurance Association oppose LCVs. The most conservative conclusion that can be drawn is that, as the Federal Highway Administration phrased it in a 1985 study, "We simply do not know whether LCVs can be operated safely in general use."

It is against this backdrop of national interest that the LCV issue must be addressed. For the fact is that LCVs would devastate railroads.

The Association of American Railroads has developed a competitive impact model to measure the effect that LCVs would have on railroads. This model has been validated by university researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The model shows that nearly 10 percent of the railroad industry's traffic would simply evaporate. Perhaps the most damaging blow would be delivered to rail intermodal traffic. Intermodal business is the movement of truck trailers and containers by rail.

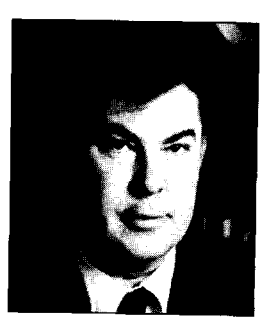
This has been the industry's fastest growing business for the past decade, with volume just about doubling between 1981 and 1990. It is now the industry's second largest source of volume, trailing only coal. But, by its very nature, this is traffic that could go either by rail or truck. Nationwide use of LCVs would divert as much as half of this freight to truck, thereby increasing highway congestion, highway damage, energy use and pollution.

The direct loss of volume is only part of the danger for railroads. In order to keep remaining freight, rail rates on other truck competitive goods would be forced down so much that the industry's profits would be virtually cut in half.

Railroads do not enjoy a surfeit of profits. Industry returns on investment average in the neighborhood of 6 percent, little more than half the 11.5 percent that the Interstate Commerce Commission says railroads need to earn in order to attract capital for renewal.

But the salient point is not that the railroad opposition to LCVs is based on self-interest. Rather, it is that, absent the railroads' participation, opposition to LCVs would still be widespread and significant—reflecting concerns about energy policy, the environment, highway financing and public safety.

Such concerns cannot—and should not—be ignored.



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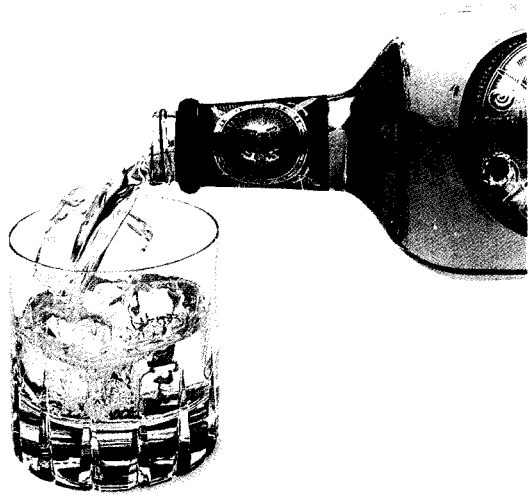

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